NEW WORLDS
SCIENCE FICTION

No. 76

VOLUME 26

2/-

DREAMBOAT
Bertram Chandler

THE DIFFERENT COMPLEXION
William F. Temple

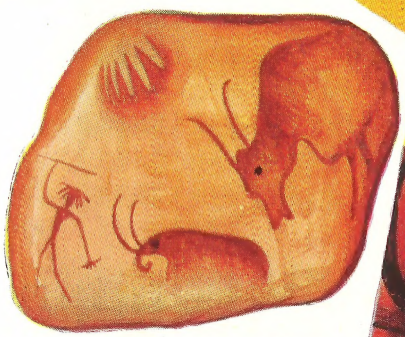
THE GUARDIAN
Philip E. High

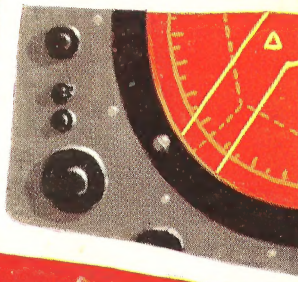
DENY THE SLAKE
Richard Wilson

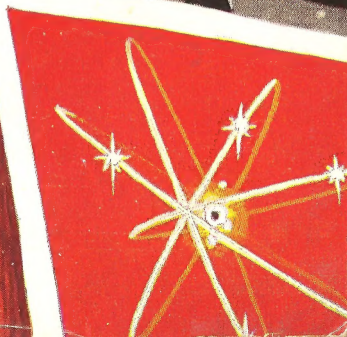
Serial
EQUATOR
Conclusion
Brian W. Aldiss

Features

12th Year of Publication







William F. Temple

Wembley, Middx.

Author Temple takes his place in Britain's Hall of Fame along with Eric Frank Russell and John Wyndham as contributors with the longest service to science fiction in this country. Before the last war, at the time he was sharing an apartment with Arthur Clarke, he was editor of the British Interplanetary Society's *Journal* and contributor of stories to s-f magazines on both sides of the Atlantic. Press-ganged into the 8th Army, he married absent-mindedly, and two children appeared from somewhere and called him "Father"—quite correctly, he discovered, upon interrogation.

In the Army he rose to the rank of gunner (!) and was discharged honourably when eventually his unit learned that the war was over. Then he contributed a story to the very first issue of *New Worlds*. Some years later his s-f novel *Four-Sided Triangle* was translated into several foreign languages, including American. A film bearing this title also appeared. Scores more of his stories appeared in British and American s-f magazines and a reasonably high percentage was anthologised. He also wrote a thriller, and a book on space travel which was illustrated by artist Gerard Quinn.

Initially through editing the *Dan Dare Annual* he strayed for a time into the pastures of juvenile fiction, but is wandering back. He was voted the most popular contributing author of 1957 to a contemporary British s-f magazine by its readers.

Recently, Frederick Muller Ltd. published a trilogy of his novels featuring the adventures of a spaceman, Martin Magnus.

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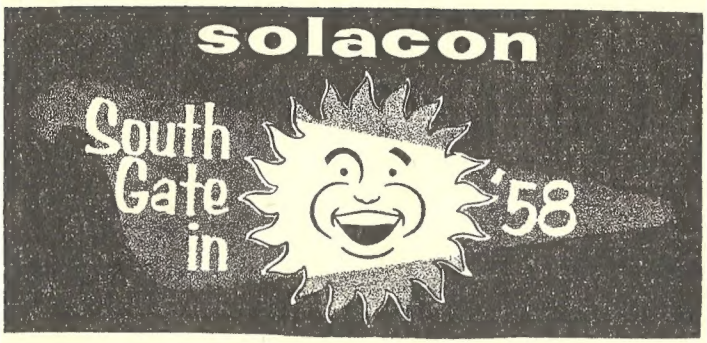

This month's Editorial space is being devoted to an account of the 16th World Science Fiction Convention held in Los Angeles, and is written by Ron Bennett, a Yorkshire schoolmaster prominent in amateur science fiction circles, who was voted by both British and America fans to represent this country at the Convention.

His ocean fare was paid out of the Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund, a non-profit organisation operated on both sides of the Atlantic with the sole aim of raising funds to meet the travel expenses of one delegate each year who will attend a national convention alternating between Europe and USA. Last year Robert Madle of Philadelphia represented North America at the London Convention.

Arriving in New York early in August, Mr. Bennett was the guest of several New York fans and then journeyed with them by car across the United States to California, where he was the guest of the Convention Committee.

His report follows.

The Alexandria Hotel, Los Angeles, Sept. 1st.

Fifteen miles from the Pacific ocean in this sprawling West Coast metropolis, the Sixteenth World Science Fiction Convention, the " Solacon," is now rapidly drawing to a close Los Angeles is humid and has a permanent coat of smog ; the temperature is *down* to the mid-eighties. Inside the Alexandria, a spacious and comfortable hotel in the heart of the downtown shopping area, delegates numbering over three hundred lively enthusiasts from all parts of the world are enjoying air conditioning and iced water. Most attendees are from the United

States and most states are represented. England, Ireland, New Zealand and Canada have also been represented here by small but firm voiced groups. Without exception all are in high spirits and are full of congratulations for the wonderful work of Mrs. Anna Sinclare Moffatt, the Convention's Chairwoman who has gracefully charmed her way through momentary crises, and the Committee which has supported her so unselfishly. Rick Sneary, the Committee Treasurer has fulfilled a ten year old dream started in 1948 with his " South Gate in '58 " slogans. The Convention Hotel has been incorporated into the City of South Gate for the duration of the Convention.

This has also been a Convention of nostalgia for the fans who remember the fan politics of the nineteen thirties. Here in Los Angeles attendees almost unanimously petitioned the Directors of the World Science Fiction Society, Incorporated to dissolve the Corporation following disagreements amongst officials during the past two years. This afternoon the Directors, Forrest J. Ackerman, E. E. Evans and David A. Kyle, himself a past Convention Committee Chairman, met and arrangements are now being made to dissolve the Incorporated Society.

Apart from the discussions which have centred round this controversial subject, the atmosphere of the Convention has throughout been one of extreme goodwill. Throughout the Convention, too, reigned a spirit of friendly combat between the science fiction clubs, and their supporters, of Detroit and Chicago to bid for the privilege to site the 1959 Convention. Detroit seemed favourites because of a lengthy period of campaigning, and although the Chicago club tried hard to pull up to them with the issue of a daily newspaper at the Convention, the confident Detroit group, who had already begun taking convention membership reservations, scored an overwhelming 125 to 45 votes to success. The Chicago club members, who had travelled overland to the Convention in the company of their rivals, were the first to congratulate Detroit.

Events started on the evening prior to the Convention when over a hundred fans and professionals met and mingled at the book-shelved home of Forrest J. Ackerman, a leading light in science fiction and film circles for several years. Forry, who attended last year's Convention in London, later spoke to the Convention attendees on science fiction films and pointed out the increasing tendency in the minds of producers to link the

genre with the cult of the monster. Arch Oboler, a T.V. producer and author was a surprise attendee at the Convention, and he echoed Ackerman's words with anecdotes from personal experiences.

On Friday afternoon, a good-natured battle in the form of an International Tea Drinking Contest was won by Miss Djinn Faine, from Catalina Island, who consumed twenty three cups before rushing to the washroom ; defeated contestants retired to the bar. This idea originated at last year's London Convention, but there were no entrants ; the Americans may now be said to have ratified the Boston Tea Party by beating the British at their own ' game.' Hilarity sobered down in the early evening when Anthony Boucher, author and editor of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* spoke on the job of an editor and why he buys the stories he does. John W. Campbell, Jr., the editor of the ever popular *Astounding Science Fiction* and Guest of Honour at last year's Convention in London, spoke on the increasing value to the field of science fiction of the psi phenomena.

On the second day, Ray Bradbury spoke on the delights of writing well. Hard work, he said, is a writer's main tool. To write well, a million bad words must be written before the good ones will flow. A panel discussed " S.F : A Dead Issue," and P. D. Johnson, Sc.D., spoke on the future of Ceramics. A highlight of the day's events was an unusually original auction at which writers like Boucher, Fritz Leiber, E. E. Evans, Robert Bloch, Charles Beaumont, Dr. E. E. Smith, and guest of Honour Richard Matheson were sold off to an eager audience.

Matheson, well known for his brilliant stories, "Born of Man and Woman," and " I Am Legend," as well as the screen play on his own novel, *The Incredible Shrinking Man*, spoke at the Sunday Banquet on psychological aspects of science fiction. At this Banquet, the Achievement Award trophies in the form of model spaceships, " The Hugos," were presented by Master of Ceremonies, Anthony Boucher. The award for the best short story was won by Avram Davies for " Overseas in Oysters," in *Galaxy Science Fiction ;* Fritz Leiber Jr., took the award for the best novel with *The Big Time :* Kelly Freas was voted the best s-f artist: the direction of Matheson's film, "The Incredible Shrinking Man," won an award for Hollywood's Jack Arnold. Boucher was pleased to have to present himself with the award for the best magazine, *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science*

Fiction, and British fans will be equally pleased to hear that Walter A. Willis of Belfast was awarded the trophy for the year's best fan magazine material. His Hugo was accepted on his behalf by Robert Shaw, the Irish author who is returning home after two years in Canada.

The Banquet provided an excellent meal and the verbal fare matched the standard of the food. Bob Bloch and Tony Boucher tossed jokes back and forth and entered into punning contests with Forry Ackerman. Mike Hinge, a young New Zealand fan who has come to California to study, and myself made short speeches. A surprise attendee was Charles D. Hornig, the editor twenty five years ago of *Wonder Stories*. Notable absentees included Wilson " Bob " Tucker of *Wild Talent* fame, and Isaac Asimov. The Convention observed a minute's silence in tribute to Henry Kuttner and Cyril Kornbluth, the author of *Takeoff* both of whom died earlier this year still young men.

Saturday evening saw the Convention hall cleared of chairs and housing the Masquerade Ball which was followed immediately by the costume Parade, always a platform for ingenuity and originality. Delegates represented vampires, intergalactic pandas and a host of Bug Eyed Monsters. After lengthy deliberation, A. E. Van Vogt, famous for many books, like *Slan* and the *World of Null-A*, local artist, pretty Betty Jo Wells, and Fritz Leiber awarded first prize to twenty year old Glendale, California, student John Lackey for his brilliant costume and acting the part of a " Fanatic."

Betty Jo herself earned much praise this afternoon when she presented a fashion show, " Fashions of the Future," in which very colourful parade, members of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society starred. The main formal programme concluded with a play by Karen Anderson and the Berkeley Science Fiction Society, an hilarious piece of nonsense about prophecy throughout the ages, " Alice in Thrilling Wonderland."

Practically every convention is said to be the " best ever," and in regards to the Solacon, these are no idle words. Detroit will have to do exceptionally well to better this gathering, but we shall see what happens in twelve month's time.

Ron Bennett

DREAMBOAT

Bertram Chandler's latest story to reach us from his Australian home has an interesting approach to the Crossing The Line ceremony enjoyed on presentday passenger ships. In this story, however, it is an interplanetary one—and Chandler's reasoning for such a ceremony in space is equally interesting.

By BERTRAM CHANDLER

That was the voyage that I found Lynn, and the voyage that I lost her. That was the voyage that we carried the little Mexican Bio-Chemist, Diego Ribiera was his name, who was partly responsible for all that happened. Partly responsible, I say—the greater degree of responsibility should have been borne by certain crew members who let their dislike of the little man lead them into an act of spitefulness that imperilled the ship.

Ribiera was blamed, of course, and is no longer with us. His first voyage as an officer of the Interstellar Transport Commission was also his last. Had it not been for the pressure brought to bear by the Rhine Institute—and the Commission is utterly dependent upon the Institute for the supply of Psionic Communications Officers—he would have faced trial. As it was, he escaped with dismissal from the Service and a severe reprimand and is now working quite happily at Duke University. No doubt the results of his research will be published eventually, but I have no intention of waiting that long.

I am writing this mainly to get myself into the right frame of mind and also, I suppose, as an apology for what I am about

to do. Legally speaking it will be desertion and, furthermore, I shall be committing the unforgivable sin of putting my woman before my ship. I'd like to apologise, Captain Saunders, for any inconvenience that I shall be causing. I assure you, though, that all my papers are up to date and that young Ferguson—he will make as good a Chief Officer as he does a Second, I hope that he will be allowed to hold his acting rank—is quite capable of taking over. After all, no one man aboard a spaceship is indispensible. You might, too, forward this manuscript to the Institute after you have read it. It may give them a useful lead in their research.

It was on the morning of Departure Day that I first met Ribiera. I was in my cabin, my slipstick running hot, trying to work out the exact location of the centre of gravity with all cargo, stores, propellant, crew and passengers on board. I was in the middle of the tricky calculations when I heard a timid tap at my door, which was open. I ignored it. After a second or so it was repeated. I swung around in my swivel chair to see who it was.

Even in his too new uniform Ribiera looked like anything but a spaceman. He was small—although that was nothing exceptional, the Commission is apt to consider that the physical advantages of small stature outweigh the psychological disadvantages—and dapper, too dapper. His complexion was too sallow, his black hair too glossy.

" Excuse me," he said, getting off on the wrong foot at once, " are you the First Officer of this boat ?"

" I am the *Chief* Officer," I snapped. " And this is not a boat."

" What is it, then ?"

" *She*," I told him, " is a *ship*."

I relented then. He was so obviously a first tripper, straight from the College of Astronautical Ecology at Kew, and could not be expected to know any more about ships than I would know about, say, Mycology. I got up from my seat, stuck out my hand.

" My name's Garrett," I told him. " Bill Garrett. And you'll be Mr. Ribiera, our new Bio-Chemist."

" Yes, Mr. Garrett," he replied. " I couldn't find any of the other officers, except a lady with zig-zag stripes on her epaulettes, and she said that she was far too busy to show half-

baked farmers around the boat—ship, I mean. So I wondered if you would be so good . . ."

" That will have been our Mary McCarthy you met," I told him. " Our Chief Steward. She's always far too busy to do anything for anybody. Anyhow, I think I can spare a few minutes. I'll show you where your cabin is first—I suppose you've brought all your gear to the spaceport ?—and then I'll take you to Hydroponics."

" This is a big boat," he said, as I led him through the alleyways.

" Wait till you get in the Alpha Class liners. The old *Game Fish* is a boat compared with them."

" The *Game Fish* ? I don't understand."

" You signed on the *Gamma Pisces*, but nobody calls her that. This is your dogbox. Small but palatial, and handy to the Farm to cut down walking time. The Farm, of course, is your own private territory. You're a departmental head, and a very important one. You'll let the Chief Steward and the Chef have what *you* think they should have, not what *they* think they should have. You are responsible for the balanced ecology of the ship."

We left this little cabin, walked along the alleyway to the Hydroponics Room.

" They still call it Hydroponics," I said. " It's a relic of the days when all the Bio-Chemist had to worry about was plant life. Spacemen used to call it The Garden, then. Now we call it The Farm." I pulled the key out of the pocket of my shorts. " This is yours now," I said, handing it to him. " The key to your kingdom."

He opened the door, darted inside like a little, eager animal.

" They have one at Kew," he said, " but it's so different seeing it aboard a real boat. And the lay-out's not quite the same . . ."

" You'll soon get used to it. That's the Sewage Farm over there—the algae tanks. This," I said, patting the side of a vat, " is Ferdinand . . ."

" Ferdinand ?"

" The Bull. Finest beef tissue culture, guaranteed to melt in mouth—except after our Chef's been murdering it."

" And those will be the yeast vats there ?"

" Yes. The Brewery."

" The Brewery ?"

" Your predecessor, Karl Gerling, used to brew beer for the boys. Good stuff, too. Far better than the dishwater supplied in the stores."

" But, Mr. Garrett, surely that is against the Commission's Regulations."

" Of course it is—but every Bio-Chemist does it. We had one in the *Virgin Betty—Beta Virginis*—who used to make vodka. Good stuff it was, too. Others have specialised in wine . . ."

" Tequila, perhaps," he murmured. " But no. I am sorry. There are not the materials. Beer it must be."

" Don't say that I told you," I warned him. " It's just one of those things that everybody does and everybody ignores."

" I have read the Commission's Regulations," he said, " and I note, too, that they forbid private experiments. I am carrying out some . . . seeds to a friend on Montezuma. I should like to try to grow some during the voyage."

" As long as it's nothing poisonous," I told him.

" No. It is nothing poisonous."

" As long as it's not man-eating orchids nobody will worry about it," I assured him. " Anyhow, she's all yours. Come and see me again in half an hour's time and I'll take you in to morning tea and introduce you to the others. The Old Man should be down at about that time, too."

I left him to it, and returned to my room and my interrupted calculations.

Departure Day is always the same. Everything that can go wrong does go wrong. Small, but important orders of stores go a-missing and everybody, of course, comes to worry the Mate about them. Every time that I picked up my slipstick there would be somebody new at my door—Evan Lloyd, the Reaction Engineer, whining about a missing cadmium damper for his Pile ; George Broderick, in charge of the Interstellar Drive, worrying me about lubricating oil for his complexity of cock-eyed gyroscopes ; Mary McCarthy expecting me to drop everything and do something about the dehydrated mushrooms that had not been delivered. Every five minutes, of course, the Old Man would buzz and demand the CG and get more and more hostile as the answer was not forthcoming.

Then there was the final checking of everything by ship's staff and the Commission's inspectors, after which the passengers boarded. At this time I was already in the Control

Room, in the nose of the ship, looking out through the big ports and the yellow wastes of the South Australian desert. There's one thing about Port Woomera—you never feel very sorry to blast up and away from it.

The others were all at their stations—the Old Man sitting at his controls, the Second Mate at the radar altimeter, the juniors at their telephones. Radio and Psionic Communications offices were manned, as were Reaction and Mannschenn Drive engine rooms. Down in the passenger deck the Purser, the Chief Steward and the Stewardesses would be looking to the comfort and safety of the passengers, with the Doctor and the Nursing Sister standing by in case required. Little Diego Ribiera would be in The Farm, worrying about the effects of acceleration upon his precious plants and tissue cultures. I found myself hoping that he would prove as good a brewer as had his predecessor. Yes, Gerling had been a good Brewer, but a poor Bio-Chemist. He had allowed the Chief Steward and the Chef far too much of a free run in Hydroponics . . .

I looked at the chronometer, saw that it was time for the last formalities.

" *Gamma Pisces* to Port Control," I said into the microphone. " *Gamma Pisces* to Port Control. Request permission to proceed."

" Permission granted," came the voice of Captain Hall, the Port Master.

" Permission granted, sir," I told the Old Man.

" Thank you, Mr. Garrett. Sound the alarms, and then count her up and out."

I sounded the alarm bells for the regulation twenty second clangour. When I switched off I could hear faintly, through the shell of the ship, the wailing of the Port Woomera sirens. One last truck was scuttling over the sand, like a frightened beetle, for the shelter of the blast walls.

" Thirty," I said into the microphone, watching the sweep second hand. " Twenty five . . . Twenty . . . Fifteen . . . Ten . . . Nine . . . Eight . . . Seven . . ."

On the word *Zero* we lifted, slowly at first and then with increasing acceleration. The desert and the buildings below were blotted out by a cloud of smoke and dust. Overhead the sky darkened and the stars began to appear. My body was heavy, sinking deeply into the padding of my chair, and I wondered—as I always wondered—what it must have been like in the days when spaceman and passengers had to endure really

brutal accelerations, before atomic power had replaced the inefficient chemical fuels.

The rest was routine—the cutting of the Drive and the swinging of the ship to her correct heading, the short resumption of rocket power to give her impetus in the right direction and then, at last, the starting of the Mannschenn Drive unit. The stars winked out, and outside our ports was the formless nothingness that we all knew and that we all, somehow, feared.

The voyage had begun.

It has been absurd, perhaps, to have written so much about the routine commencement of a routine voyage. Even you gentlemen at the Rhine Institute will know all about it ; even if you have never been in Deep Space yourselves you will have seen films and read books, and those of you who are telepaths will have shared the thoughts and impressions of your graduates who are Psionic Communications Officers.

It has been absurd, perhaps—but it has been deliberate.

Its aim has been the recreation of a mood—and that is essential to my plans. I have had to recall all the details, and the setting of them down on paper has helped. I have to remember how I felt when I pulled myself along the guide rails to the saloon, there to take my seat at my table for the first meal of the voyage.

I was in no mood to deal with passengers. It had been a long day, and a tiring one. I knew already the silly questions I should be asked by the customers sharing my board. " Why can't you keep the rockets running all the way to Montezuma so as to give us a substitute for gravity ?" " Why are the shutters up over all the viewports ?" " How does the Interstellar Drive really work ? I read a story once about a ship where the I.D. went wrong, and they all got caught up in a Time Cycle . . . Could that happen here ?" And so on. And so on.

The two men at my table were already there, already seated, when I came in. I pulled myself to my seat, adjusted the lapstrap over my thighs, introduced myself. One of the passengers was in early middle age—a farmer, I imagined, probably from Castoria, our next planet of call after Montezuma. The other one was a beardless youth. He was, I learned, also going out to Castoria—an emigrant. He looked the type who would ask all the stock silly questions. He did.

While I was coping with the first one—the one about keeping the Interplanetary Drive running all the way to Montezuma—Lynn came in. She swam to the table with the ease of an experienced traveller, acknowledged the half bows that are the only form of courtesy possible in Free Fall—if one rose from the table one would be liable to rise too far and too fast—slid gracefully into the chair on my right.

I looked at her, and decided that I didn't like her. She was, I thought, a little too sleek, a little too self-contained, a little too elegant. She would, I was sure, find a ship's officer, a farmer and a migrant very boring company and would—although not blatantly—let us know it.

" I'm sorry I interrupted," she said sweetly. " Do carry on, Mr. Garrett. It is Mr. Garrett, isn't it ?"

" It is," I said. " Have you met Mr. Wells and Mr. Taine, Miss Verity ?"

" Yes. The Purser introduced us all in the Lounge during switchover. But don't let me interrupt you. I'm sure that Mr. Taine must be anxious to hear all about how the Drive works and all the rest of it."

One of the stewardesses came and took our orders.

When the interruption was over I said, " We can't run the Reaction Drive for two reasons, Mr. Taine. One is that we just don't carry sufficient reaction mass. The other one is that if we did so we should be changing the mass of the ship, and that, when the Mannschenn Drive is working, would be asking for trouble."

" Just like in the story I read," he said eagerly. " There was this ship, you see, and somebody fired off the rockets while the Mannschenn Drive was working and got her all caught up in a Time Cycle. They'd go so far—say to next Wednesday—and then find themselves back at last Thursday and have to go through the week again. It was the hero who got them out of it—he had a rocket motor unmounted and carried forward so it would fire out through the nose of the ship . . ."

" I'm afraid it's nothing so glamorous," I told him. " It's just that if we change the ship's mass while the Drive is running it throws the Drive's automatic controls out of kilter—after all, it's set to deal with a certain, definite mass—and things run hot and start blowing fuses, and the whole business of lining the ship up for her destination has to be gone through again, which is not exciting, but just hard work."

" I can see how the plates stay on the table," he said. " It's done by magnets. But why should the food stay on the plates ?"

" Why shouldn't it ?" I countered. " It's just a case of cohesion. Of course, a certain amount of care is necessary whilst wielding one's fork . . ."

I was careless as I wielded mine. A gob of the Chef's special pate (opinions differed—some said that it was made from processed algae, others that it was made from the ship's sewage before the algae had a chance to get to work on it) flew from my plate and hit Miss Verity under the right eye.

" Thank you for the demonstration," she said coldly. " It helps so much to have an experienced spaceman to advise in these matters."

The absurd incident had the effect of setting the mood for the rest of the meal, and dinner, that night, was one of the Chef's less inspired efforts in any case. It is the custom that the first meal of the voyage shall consist of traditional fare—yeasts and algae—so as to give passengers an idea of what it was like in the old days before the Hydroponics Room became, in effect, a farm. I'll say this for our Chef—he always contrived to destroy any false ideas about the glamour of the Good Old Days.

I wasn't sorry when dinner was over.

As soon as I could I drifted along to the Purser's office, found Kennedy enjoying a surreptitious sip from his own private stock of brandy. He opened a drawer, tossed me a plastibulb.

" I suppose you'd better have one," he said.

" Thanks, although I didn't come for that. I'd just like to skim through the passenger data sheets. It helps with conversation if I have some idea of the backgrounds of the people at my table."

" Help yourself," he replied, handing me the file.

I leafed through it.

" Taine," I said, reading aloud. " George. Birthplace Birmingham, England, Terra . . . Occupation—circuit spotter. What *is* a circuit spotter, Ralph ?"

" Search me. The engineers might know."

" Wells, Herbert. Grazier, of Hamersham, Castoria . . ."

" Why didn't you look up Verity, Lynn, first ? Rather funny that. Verity Lynn sounds just as good as Lynn Verity.

But I'll tell you about her. Born on Caribbea, but educated on Terra. Freelance journalist, and a successful one. Writes a lot for the women's magazines and appears on their video programmes. Specialises in travelogues of planets that have specialised in the revival of old, moribund Terran cultures—such as, for example, Montezuma. Satisfied ?"

" Yes, thanks. I know what I can talk about now. Farming on Castoria. Freelance journalism. Circuit spotting. I must see one, or both, of the Chiefs and find out what it's all about."

" As though you cared," he said, smirking.

" It's my business to find out," I said virtuously.

(As a matter of fact I still don't know what a circuit spotter is or does).

I left Kennedy then, made my way back to the Lounge. I saw Lynn. She was at one of the small tables, with Wells and Taine in close attendance. Her Caribbean origin was obvious —she was smoking a cigar instead of one of the small, jewelled pipes without which the majority of colonial women would not consider themselves properly dressed. I considered joining them, then decided against it. The affair of the mishandled pate had done little to endear me to her.

I saw that little Ribiera was not among the officers present, so wandered along first to his cabin, then to the Farm. He opened the door of the Hydroponics Room when I sounded the buzzer, let me in.

" Putting the cows to bed ?" I asked facetiously.

" No, Mr. Garrett. It is that Chef. He came tonight for the material for the meal, and I let him dip his own yeast and algae from the vats. When his dipper was last cleaned I do not know. One vat of algae I cannot save, I have had to destroy."

" Considering what they live on," I said, " you wouldn't think that they'd be fussy. Still—I suppose that there are micro-organisms *and* micro-organisms . . ."

" Then," he said, " I remembered what you told me, about the activities of my predecessor."

He handed me a plastibulb.

" What's this ?"

" Beer," he said, grinning whitely.

" Already ?"

" It is a poor Bio-Chemist," he told me, " who cannot accelerate natural processes."

I raised the nipple to my lips and sipped. I restrained myself from spitting, restrained myself from remarking that he seemed to have been successful in accelerating the natural process of decay.

" You do not like ?" he asked.

" I hate hurting your feelings," I said, " but I do not like. It's even worse than the dishwater they sell at the bar. You'll have to do better than this, Diego."

" I'll try," he said, looking miserable.

" Don't take it so much to heart. This beer making is only a sideline, just something that you do as a favour to the Old Man and the senior officers in return for the favours they can do you. If you can't make beer—there's always wine. We had one farmer—Lorenzini was his name—who used to turn out Chianti and Vermouth, both of which were as good as any I've had in Italy."

" Yes, there is always wine," he said, brightening.

" There's always wine—but don't let it worry you. Your job is to maintain a balanced ecology, not a Deep Space distillery."

I let myself drift lazily around the Farm, enjoying the smell of growing things, the warm radiance of the big, artificial sunlight lamps, the musical tinkling of water. I pulled up by one of the tanks, looked curiously at the plants that were growing on some sort of black humous.

" What the hell are these, Diego ? Toadstools ?"

" No, Mr. Garrett. They are mushrooms. You said yourself that private experiments were allowable."

" Well, not exactly allowable, but . . . So they're mushrooms, are they ? So the Old Man will be able to have his traditional steak dinner, with all the trimmings, after all on Halfway Night."

" They are mushrooms, but they are not for eating."

" So they *are* poisonous."

" No, Mr. Garratt. They are not poisonous. It is just that they are not the eating kind."

" Seems odd to me. But I've known people to keep some queer vegetable pets—aspidistras and so forth."

" Would you like some more beer, Mr. Garrett ?"

" No thank you," I said hastily.

I left the Farm, made leisurely rounds of the vessel. I looked in on the Duty Engineer in the Reaction Drive engine

room, yarned with him for a spell while he kept his eye on the Pile and the generators. I dropped into the Mannschenn Drive room, being careful not to look too long and too closely at the complexity of spinning, precessing wheels while I passed the time of day with the watchkeeper. There was nobody in the Radio Office—light-speed communications are, of course, useless when the FTL Drive is in operation. The Psionics Communication Office was manned, and I hung around in there for a while, listening, at second hand, to the conversations that Phil Kent, our Rhineman, was holding with his opposite numbers aboard other ships in space and in the various spaceports.

Then I went back to my own cabin—by-passing the Lounge—and turned in.

It was a restless sleep, made all the more so by the way in which I dreamed, very vividly, of Lynn Verity.

That dream should have been regarded as what, in fact, it was—a clear indication of the state of affairs in my subconscious mind. My subconscious knew that I had fallen in love with Lynn at first sight, but it was weeks before I would admit it. It's obvious enough now. At table conversation became little more than a duet, with neither Wells nor Taine able to get a word in edgewise. Even worse, so far as our companions were concerned, our conversation took on a sort of shorthand quality. It was no more than the sketchy outlines of a conversation—but we, Lynn and I, were able to fill in all the gaps.

I was attracted and, at the same time, scared. Subconsciously I knew what we were heading into, and I didn't like it. I had seen it happen too many times before. I had seen too many officers falling in love, either with a passenger or with some girl on one of the planets of call and, shortly thereafter, resigning from the Service. Deep Space is no life for a married man.

You run across them quite often, these ex-Deep Spacers. You find them as pilots of little, Fourth of July rockets, running short-hop ferry services from some dull planet to its even duller satellite. You find them as Assistant Port Masters at minor spaceports. You meet a few who have contrived—usually with the aid of their wife's money or connections—to sever their connections with Space entirely. They all tell you the same thing—that they're very happy and wouldn't come

back for all the gold of Dorado—but you can see from their eyes they'd sell their souls for a tall ship and the Long Haul.

That's what I used to think, anyhow. Do I still?

I don't know.

But I had more worries than the way in which things were building up between Lynn and myself. As well as my own worries there were all the other ones that were dumped on my plate by one and all. There was Mary McCarthy trotting along to my room or to Control at all hours, mainly to complain about the Bio-Chemist. She was locked out of the Farm, she would say, and that was a thing that never happened in Mr. Gerling's time. Mr. Gerling had let her have a duplicate key, so that she could take supplies of green salads and such at any time that was convenient to her.

The real trouble, as I well knew, was that Karl Gerling had kept her well supplied with beer, in return for favours rendered. Karl Gerling liked Rubensque women—even when, as in Mary Mc Carthy's case, their eyes are too small and set too close together, their faces more porcine than human.

The Chef—and he was a friend of Mary's—was always complaining to me about the same thing. Mr. Gerling, he told me, had always let him help himself to the tissue cultures and the yeasts and algae, had let him use his own discretion. All I could tell him was what I told McCarthy—that Ribiera was the head of his own department and would have to carry the can back if anything went wrong with the ecology of the ship.

Ribiera was beginning to get into my hair too.

"Nobody likes me, Mr. Garrett," he would complain. "Nobody, except you. It is the beer, I think. I try to make them the beer—but it is not my national drink."

"Your beer wouldn't be anybody's national drink," I told him unkindly. "Not even a Venusian swamp trotter's."

He ignored this.

"I try to make them the wine . . ."

"It had," I admitted, "a certain medicinal value . . ."

"And then there are the Chief Steward and the Chef. They think that they should be free to come and go as they please in *my* Farm. The Chef tried to take my mushrooms, and was very annoyed when I stopped him. He ate one before I could stop him. He was drunk at the time."

"Oh? Was he? I wonder where *he* gets it from?"

"The Captain doesn't like me. The Officers don't like me. The passengers don't like me. They call me the Dago, the Spiggoty."

I was annoyed. Racial animosity should have been dead generations ago—yet it still keeps cropping up. The Master of an Interstellar vessel has the power to take disciplinary action against anybody, crew member or passenger, who raises the old, ugly ghosts. I decided that I'd see the Old Man on the subject as soon as little Diego left me.

" Anything else ?" I asked.

" No, Mr. Garrett, but that is plenty."

" Have a gin, then." I waited until he had taken the first sip from the bulb. " Now, seeing that you can't make either wine or beer, what about trying your hand at gin ?"

" I'll try, Mr. Garrett," he promised.

He tried, but the result did no more to endear him to his shipmates than his other efforts had done. I am sure that his ineptitude in this unofficial branch of his calling was the cause of Captain Saunders' refusing to take seriously the complaints that I laid before him regarding racial animosity. Poor little Ribiera was still the Dago, still the Spiggoty, and was treated with contempt by crew and passengers alike, almost without exception.

Oh yes, there were exceptions. Kent, our First Psionics Communications Officer, was one, Evan Lloyd, the Reaction Engineer, was another. " There's no vice in the little man, Bill," he assured me. " He's not like some people in this ship who take it as a personal affront if some pump or fan or whatever packs up and who expect me to drop everything and rush to fix it . . ."

" Meaning, of course, our Mary McCarthy and her pal, the Chef."

" Yes. Meaning little Mary and the Head Poisoner. Anyone would think that the ship exists only to carry the Catering Department from star to star."

" Whereas," I said, " any spaceman knows that the ship exists only to carry the rocket motors from planet to planet."

" Of course. Joking apart, though, what I like about him is that he has no delusions of grandeur. He knows that we're all parts of a whole, and have to work together."

Lynn, of course, was yet another exception. I think that it was the persecution of the little Mexican that drew us together. We were both sorry for him. We both did what we could to make life easier for him. In the evenings we encouraged him

to come and sit with us in the Lounge, and we were often joined by Phil Kent and Evan Lloyd. He loved to hear us talk of our travels, of ships and strange planets and stranger peoples. He was longing to be assured that he was one of us, a spaceman.

" You will be," said Evan, " after the Halfway Day."

" The Halfway Day?" he asked. " Oh, yes. I had forgotten. It is like the Crossing the Line Ceremony that they have aboard surface ships on planets where there are seas."

" It is," I said.

" But could you tell me, Mr. Garrett, what is the symbolism? What is the . . . the *meaning*?"

" The central character of Crossing the Line ceremonies," I said, " is, of course, King Neptune—Neptune being the God of the Sea in one of the old religions. He grants permission for the new hands, those who have not crossed the Equator before, to proceed without let or hindrance over and through his territory. We, of course, make Father Time our central figure. We are, in effect, flouting Time when we make our faster than light passages.

" Halfway Day itself is a very important day in the voyage. For weeks we have seen nothing, have been running on whatever information we've been able to get from our mass indicators—and they're far from accurate except at close range. So, on Halfway Day we stop the Drive. We see the stars again—and the sight is welcome, believe me. We take our observations and find out if we're where we should be. We make any necessary adjustments to our course. The Mannschen Drive is allowed to cool down and is given a thorough overhaul. In this ship it is the custom to celebrate with a steak dinner. I hope, by the way, that Ferdinand is in good health . . ."

" He is so. But what I was wondering about was this—will there be any sort of . . . of ordeal? I have read of these things."

" Oh, you'll be accused of trespass, and tried by Father Time's court. There'll be a bit of horseplay, and at the finish of it you'll be given a certificate authorising you to exceed the speed of light without fear of precession or contraction between any two stars in the known Universe. You won't be the only one to go through the mill. There're two cadets and four or five passengers. And Father Time himself gets what's coming to him at the finish."

" All very childish," said Lynn, " but fun. Tell me, Bill—do you run to a swimming bath in this ship ?"

" Yes. We clear the Lounge so that we can rig it. We fill it and we hold the ceremony while the ship is accelerating at a half gravity or so ; we have to build up speed again after the Mannschen Drive shut-down and before we restart."

" I suppose that it is necessary," said Ribiera.

" The swimming bath ? The building up speed ?"

" No. The . . . the ceremony."

" If ever you're to think of yourself as a real spaceman, it is," said Evan Lloyd.

That was one of the nights that we had the usual family party after dinner. That was one of the nights that we drank our coffee together and smoked and talked, and pulled little Ribiera's leg and then played cards.

There was the night, a little later, when there were just Lynn and myself. Phil wasn't with us—he had a heavy rush of traffic to cope with. Evan wasn't with us—he was having generator trouble. Ribiera wasn't with us—it seemed that the Chef had made some sort of mess in the Hydroponics Room that had to be cleared up without delay.

For some reason there were very few people in the Lounge that night. The ship was very quiet, only the soft whining of the Drive and the occasional cough of a pump breaking the silence. The lights seemed dimmer than usual. Come to think of it—they were dimmer. Owing to the generator trouble non-essential circuits were being starved so as to maintain a full supply of power to essential machines and instruments.

We sat in our chairs, Lynn and I, our lapstraps giving us the illusion of weight, of gravity. I looked at her, at her thin, finely featured face, her dark hair with the coppery sheen.

" A penny for them," she said.

I held out my hand. She opened her bag, extracted a one cent piece. I took it.

" I was thinking," I said, " that I shall be sorry when this voyage is over."

" So shall I," she said. " We get on rather well—although at first I never thought that we should. I thought—a typical spaceman, who thinks that his uniform makes him first cousin to the Almighty."

" And doesn't it ?"

" Some of the others, yes. The Old Man. That poisonous Chief Steward of yours. One or two of the juniors. But not you."

" Thanks," I said.

There was a silence.

" We're both of us civilised people, Bill. We're not living in the dark days of the Twentieth Century. What we do is our own concern. We want each other. Well—I know that I want you, and I'm pretty sure that you want me. And . . . Damn it all, Bill, do I have to rape you ?"

" I'm scared," I said slowly.

" Scared ? *You* ? The stories I've heard about you don't scare easily—not of anything in skirts, that is."

" Not of the usual silly bitches who think that the cost of their passage covers an affair with one of the ship's officers. Of you—yes."

" Why ?" she asked.

" It's a case of being frightened of getting involved too deeply. I'm happy here, in Deep Space. It's my life. The ship is a mistress to me, a wife. In the old days of surface ships on Earth's seas they used to call the Mate the ship's husband. Did you know that ? A husband can have the odd, casual affair without leaving his wife. But it's the affair that turns out to be anything but casual that breaks up marriages."

" If that's the way you feel about it," she said.

" That's the way I feel about it. When I marry—as I suppose that I shall, some day—it will be to somebody who will take second place to the ship, to the Service."

" God help her," she said.

She unsnapped her lapstrap, drifted up and out from the chair. I made as though to follow her.

" Don't bother, Mr. Garrett," she said. " And thank you for being so honest. At least you've spared me the humiliation of being dropped, as you would have dropped me, at the behest of an insensate construction of metal, a *thing*. I can find my way to my cabin, thank you."

I watched her go. I watched the slimness of her, the grace of her, as she floated towards one of the alleyways leading out of the Lounge. I cursed myself for having been so honest—but knew that by being honest I had saved both of us from deep involvement, had, perhaps, saved her from serious hurt.

I finished the brandy in my plastibulb, tossed the empty container towards a disposal chute—and missed—and then made my way to my own quarters.

Halfway Day was, as it always is, a busy day.

In some ships the Captain plays the major part in the Halfway Day ceremonies, in others, such as *Gamma Pisces*, it is the Mate. It is not every shipmaster who cares to expose his sacred person to the risk of being mauled either by passengers or by his junior officers. It is, of course, essential that someone of senior rank be present lest affairs develop into a serious brawl.

So I was sitting in the Lounge—really sitting, as the Interstellar Drive was off and the Reaction Drive in operation—in one of the chairs placed around the plastic pool. The shutters over the big viewports had been withdrawn, and through the thick transparencies gleamed the bright, multitudinous stars, grouped in half familiar constellations. The passengers were enjoying the glorious spectacle outside the ship ; I was pretending to be engrossed in a book.

Then came the sound that I was waiting for—a steady tap-tap-tapping. There was a scream from one of the women, a cry of " Look !"

I got up and looked. Outside the nearer viewport were three spacesuited figures, three human forms in gleaming white armour. One of them, with a luminous crayon held in his gloved hand, scrawled carefully on the outside of the glass :

WE DEMAND ENTRY

" Mr. Craig," I said to the Fourth Officer, " go to the airlock and see who these people are and what they want."

" Ay, ay, sir !" he replied smartly.

" I hope that your *wife* finds all this amusing," said somebody.

I turned round, saw that it was Lynn.

" This could, I suppose, be regarded as a sort of anniversary," I said.

" How touching," she replied.

From outside the Lounge came the sound of the beating of a gong—twelve slow, solemn strokes. Over the intercommunication system came the chiming of a ship's clock—eight bells, repeated after a short interval. Again the strokes of the gong sounded, closer, much closer.

A fantastic figure marched into the Lounge. He was wearing a parody of uniform that had, pinned to the left breast, a half dozen fob watches in lieu of medals. On each arm were at least six wrist watches. He carried before him a velvet

cushion, on which reposed a cheap, tin alarm clock whose ticking was clearly audible.

It was the senior Watchkeeper.

" Attention all ! Attention all !" he cried. " It has come to the notice of my royal master, King Chronos, Lord of the Split Second, Grand Marshall of the Millenia, that certain of his subjects are seeking to contravene his inflexible laws and, without having paid their just dues, have had the temerity to outrun light itself. Therefore my master, Father Time, has deigned to visit in person the good ship *Game Fish* to ensure that these miscreants realise that it is later than they think !" He did something to the alarm clock and it shrilled loudly, then ceased. " Father Time !" he cried.

Father Time was as impressive as a bedsheet, a long white beard, a bald wig and a cardboard scythe could make him. He was attended by the Houris—four stewardesses, suitably attired—and the Seconds, in long, black trousers, white canvas shoes and white turtle necked sweaters. I wished that we could have carried our punning sybolism to its logical extreme and had twenty four of the one and sixty of the other—but even the Alpha Class ships can't run to that.

" And who," demanded Father Time, " is in charge of this rust bucket ?"

" I am, Your Majesty."

" Don't they teach you manners in the Space Academy these days ? Where is the moth-eaten carpet ? Where is the worm-riddled throne ?"

And why can't you *stick to the script* ? I thought.

" The carpet has finally disintegrated with age," I said, " and the throne has collapsed. Will Your Majesty be seated ?"

He let me lead him to the black velvet-draped chair at the edge of the pool. His Court arranged itself more or less decoratively around him. The Senior Watchkeeper handed the alarm clock to his master, drew from a pocket a sheet of paper.

" Can you," he said, addressing me, " deny that the persons named herein are intruders in Deep Space, unlicensed beneficiaries of the FTL Drive, planet lubbers of the most miserable category ?"

He read the names.

" Seconds !" cried Father Time. " Seconds out of the ring ! The hour has struck ! There's no time like the present !

Bring me these temporal tresspassers ! I'll stop their clocks for them !"

And so it went on. It was all, at first, good, harmless fun. The victims' heads were shaved—in the case of the women it was only a symbolical shaving—and suffered the makebelieve administrations of the court dentist. A vile tasting fluid—the Elixir of Youth—was forced down their throats. They were thrown into the pool. They all enjoyed it—until it came to the turn of Ribiera.

Something ugly crept in then.

Partly it was Ribiera's own fault—he was the sort of victim who makes things so much worse for himself. He was frightened, and he was hating his persecutors, and they were hating him. I looked at him as he was dragged into the Lounge by two brawny Seconds—his uniform shirt was torn, his face was white and his eyes were gleaming fiercely. I liked the little man, but at this moment I found it hard to feel sympathy for him. The Halfway Day rites were something that we all had to go through—and, after all, it's only once in a lifetime of spacefaring.

" And what," demanded Father Time, " is this ?"

" A farmer, Your Majesty," replied the Senior Watchkeeper. " He was found lurking among his lettuces, seeking cover behind the adamantine flanks of Ferdinand the Bull."

" Macerate and feed him to his own algae," growled Father Time. " Thrash him with sticks of celery until his screams would rend even the heart of a lettuce. Drown him in a butt of his own vile beer. But first, we would remind him that youth is fleeting and that Time takes his toll of all men. Proceed with the depilation !"

Two of the Seconds held the Bio-Chemist firmly. A third who was also the Court Barber, advanced with the electric clippers. Ribiera was proud of his hair. He screamed something in his native tongue ; it sounded like a curse. He began to struggle madly. It was all, of course, very amusing. It was even more amusing when the three Seconds and Ribiera fell into the pool with a loud splash.

It wasn't so amusing when the electric clippers, the flex of which had become wound around the little Mexican's neck, shorted with a bright blue flash. It was even less amusing when the limp body of the Bio-Chemist was lifted out of the pool and the Surgeon and the Nursing Sister pushed their way

through the frightened passengers and officers to kneel by his side.

" It's nothing serious, Bill," said the Surgeon to me. " He'll live—but he'll not be able to enjoy his Halfway Day dinner tonight. Organise a stretcher party for me, will you? We'll get him along to his cabin."

So that was the finish of the Halfway Day ritual. I left the juniors to do the clearing up, went up to Control and reported to Captain Saunders what had happened.

" It was my fault," I said. " I should have stopped it."

" Yes," he agreed, " it was your fault, but it was his fault too. The man will never be a spaceman if he can't take a little innocent horseplay."

" Horseplay?" I asked. " There was rather too much of a lynching feel to the whole sorry business."

" Rubbish," he said. " The man's not pulling his weight, and that's why people don't like him. Meanwhile—how are things in Hydroponics?"

" I checked up, sir," I told him. " There's nothing that can't run itself until tomorrow, and Ribiera should be on his feet again then. I'll be on hand when the Chef slices the wherewithal for tonight's dinner off Ferdinand, and see that he leaves things clean and tidy."

" You might be a little less niggardly than Ribiera is," he told me.

It is axiomatic that locks and keys exist only to inconvenience honest men. Those who are not honest will either have to hand the means for forcing locks or duplicate keys. Either the Chief Steward or the Chef had a duplicate key to Hydroponics, but that was their own little secret. They were waiting patiently outside the Farm when I went along, and drew the issue of beef and the green salads under my supervision.

I had to hurry back to Control then. All the necessary observations had been taken and the final course adjustments made, and the Reaction Drive was about to be shut down and the Mannschenn Drive restarted. There was no real need for me in Control, but the Commission's Regulations state that on such occasions every senior officer shall be present.

We sat in our chairs and listened to the whine of the Interstellar Drive rising in pitch, watched the stars wink and flicker and vanish. We satisfied ourselves that all was well, then left the Control Room to the Officer of the Watch.

It was almost dinner time.

I went straight to my cabin, showered in the little, adjoining toilet cubicle, then dressed in mess uniform. I looked in to see Ribiera. He was conscious, but was looking rather sick and sorry for himself.

He said, " Mr. Garrett, please tell the Doctor that I must go see that all is well in Hydroponics."

" The Doctor says that you are to stay here until tomorrow," I told him. " Everything is all right in Hydroponics. I saw to it myself that the Chef and Chief Steward took only what was needed for tonight's meal. The Farm is locked up now, and will stay that way until you get back to it."

" But the algae . . ."

" They're doing fine. Evan made a good job on that pump you were complaining about ; it's running without a murmur."

The gong sounded then, and I left him.

The passengers at my table were already seated when I pulled myself into my chair. Lynn enquired about Ribiera, and I told her that there was nothing wrong with him that rest wouldn't cure. She said something unkind about the serious consequences of childish games, and I replied that no Service could be run without traditions, and before the stewardess had served the first course we were snarling at each other like a couple of strange dogs and Wells and Taine were listening with keen enjoyment.

The pate was followed by steak. Tissue culture steak is always good—provided that the culture is not so old that the cells are beginning to lose their specialisation—and even our Chef couldn't ruin it completely. And he had contrived to provide with it a mushroom sauce. There was a vague memory in my mind of Mary McCarthy's having complained to me before the start of the voyage that the dehydrated mushrooms had not arrived, but I assumed that she must eventually have found them.

" From the Farm ?" asked Lynn.

" The steak ? Of course."

" No. The mushrooms."

" As a matter of fact, no. They're dehydrated. The Commission has some very old fashioned ideas about what can be done and what can't be done in Hydroponics. The Regulations state that only plants that play their part in the air conditioning may be grown. There is an amendment that covers yeasts, but nobody's got around towards making one in favour of mushrooms."

" How absurd."

" I don't think so. Dehydrated mushrooms, after all, weigh very little, and why take up tank space for something that can be carried in dehydrated form ?"

Then, with dinner over, the Old Man made his usual Halfway Day speech, and shortly thereafter we all adjourned to the Lounge. There was music, a good recording of one of my favourites—Bronstein's *Nine Planets Suite*. You know it, of course. You know the fire music of the first movement, Mercury—although I am assured by one of the few men I know who has visited that inhospitable planet that Bronstein most certainly did not have the Dark Hemisphere in mind. There is the second movement—all tumbling, crashing surf and shrieking winds—and the third movement, that echoes the rhythmic clangour of machines. The one that I love most of all is the last movement, the tenth, the Deep Space theme. It was better that night than I have ever heard it. The faintly heard whine of the Drive was part of the music, and the music was part of it. It was as Bronstein must have imagined it, must have intended it—four dimensional. It was as nobody, not even Bronstein, could ever have heard it played.

All the emptiness was there, all the loneliness. The glimmer of distant stars was there and the brief flare of rocket drive, and all the wonder of the frail metal shells, with their human freight, driving across the vast reaches of the night.

The loneliness was there, but I was not alone. Lynn was with me. I repeat—she was *with* me. We were together, but we were not in the ship ; we were floating slowly over a landscape that glowed in the light of a golden sun, over the surface of an unspoiled world that was, we knew, an Eden before the Fall.

Slowly, unhurriedly, we shed our garments—yet when we came together it was with a sense of urgency. I held her bright body in my arms, and her slim arms were around me, and what we did was of a deep completeness that I had never known before, that I shall never know again.

Unless . . .

Then she was falling from me, down through the lucent air towards a golden beach by a blue sea. I knew that I should follow, that I must follow. I knew that if we set foot on this world together—where is it ? *when* is it ?—there would be no going back, ever, for either of us.

I saw her falling, her slender, glowing body turning slowly. She held out her arms to me. I knew that only a small effort of will was necessary for me to follow her—but I could not make it.

I remembered too much. I remembered all the little things left undone, all the loose ends yet to be tucked in. I remembered the unfinished Maintenance Reports and the Mate's Log that was all of seven days in arrears. I remembered all that would have to be put in hand before our arrival at Montezuma.

I remembered that I was, as I had told her, the ship's husband.

I remember that I was a fool.

She was gone then, and the bright, perfect world was gone with her. I looked dazedly around my cabin. I was naked, and of my clothing there was no trace. I pulled shirt and shirts out of a drawer, put them on hastily, scoured the ship in a vain effort to find her.

She was gone.

And, it seemed, I was the only sober person in the ship. All the others were, I thought at first, drunk—but it was not drunkenness. They were singing in the Lounge—a strange, rhythmic chant accented by hand clappings. I found Captain Saunders and shook him, trying to bully him into a state of awareness.

" The glory," he said. " The glory. The mountains of ice with the twin suns behind them, and the caravan, with its softly beating bells, winding through the pass . . ."

I left him in despair, tried to pummel some sense into Evan Lloyd. He babbled of the cloudy, fiery pillar, of the crystal fountains and the healing stream.

I remembered then how my own sense of responsibility had pulled me back from the world of unreality—or reality. I made for the axial shaft, pulled myself along to Control. I punched the General Alarm button. In a matter of only seconds, it seemed, the Old Man was with me, wanting to know what was wrong and the officer of the watch was blinking bewilderedly at his two seniors, a badly frightened young man.

That was when the stink started, the big stink.

Poor little Diego was the scapegoat. It was his mushrooms that had done the damage—the hallucinogenic fungi, the spawn of which he was carrying to his friends on Montezuma,

some of which he had grown experimentally in Hydroponics. Neither the Chef nor the Chief Steward had any right, of course, to be in a possession of a duplicate key to the Farm, and certainly they had had no right to take anything from Hydroponics without Ribiera's knowledge.

They're off things, those Mexican mushrooms. For centuries they have been known as producers of dreams and visions, as stimulators of the psionic powers. This, however, was the first time that they had ever been eaten in Deep Space, away from all Terrestrial influence. This was the first time that they had ever been eaten in a ship running with time twisting, dimension warping Mannschenn Drive in operation.

But Lynn was gone. Not a trace of her. She could, in her drug-induced trance, have gone out through the airlock—but had she done so she would have stayed in the field of the ship ; her body would have accompanied us until the first change of acceleration. Too, Evan Lloyd assured us that the airlock door had not been opened since Father Time and his party went outside for the beginning of the Halfway Day ceremony.

Lynn was gone.

Clad in a spacesuit I crawled over every inch of the hull, searching in vain for some trace of her. With the others helping I went through the ship from stem to stern, leaving no possible hiding place, however absurd, uninvestigated. The Old Man, I know, still thinks that she went outside. He still thinks that she, a slim and fragile woman, went into the airlock and—all this with no spacesuit—opened the outer door and then still had sufficient strength to make one mighty leap into nothingness, carrying her frozen and asphyxiated body clear of the gravitational field of the ship and the temporal field of the Drive.

But this is not so bad as what he thought at first. He thought that I, properly dressed for the job, took her to the airlock and threw her out. Evan Lloyd, the strongest man on board, went into the airlock with a bundle of the same mass as the average adult human body and proved that this was impossible.

And Ribiera ?

He was lucky. He was to have faced trial on Montezuma on charges of barratry and sabotage, to name just two, but Phil Kent had been in telepathic communication with his friends in the Rhine Institute, and the Institute, as far as I can gather, demanded that Diego be dismissed at once from the Service and enrolled as a member of its research staff.

" You will find her," he said to me, as he walked ashore. " You will find her. I am sure of that, Mr. Garrett. And this will help you."

I looked at what he had given to me. It was a half dozen dried mushrooms.

I know what to do.

On the homeward passage, when the ship is, as nearly as I can judge, where she was on Halfway Night, I shall eat them. I shall make sure that all my papers are in order. I shall remind myself that no man is indispensable. I shall tell myself that the ship is only a thing, and that the Commission is neither father nor mother but merely an employer of labour, an employer to whom I owe nothing.

That is the time, and the place.

I have dreamed of Lynn, and I know that she is there, on that golden beach, waiting. I know that the world on which she waits for me is perfect as no planet in this Galaxy could ever be—but, even if it were not, her presence would make it so.

I must apologise to you gentlemen of the Rhine Institute. I know that you have been looking forward to hearing my story at first hand.

But you will have one consolation.

If this manuscript comes into your possession you will know that my desperate experiment was successful.

Bertram Chandler

No Fuel Needed—Just Whistle !

" As the rocket hurtles towards the moon its radio signals will change in pitch just as a train whistle drops in pitch as it moves away from an observer. This will give it speed."

From a report on the American moon rocket, in the London News Chronicle.

THE GUARDIAN

By PHILIP E. HIGH

There are an infinite number of plots which can be written round the chances of finding a human-looking alien who is hiding somewhere on Earth, but we think Mr. High's 'trained observer' approach herewith is one of the better ideas on this theme.

Barton rested thick elbows on his desk and said, abruptly, "We want all the help we can get. Pick up Lessiter."

"But he's had no training, no background for this kind of work," remonstrated Marsh with some vigour. "How do we know he'll come if we send for him."

"If we pick him up," corrected Barton, sharply. "And, my friend, we cannot afford not to use him, training or no training." He indicated a pile of books balanced precariously on the edge of the desk. "Have you read these?"

Marsh admitted that he hadn't.

"You should, you should. Do you realise we're re-organising our training methods on these findings? The type-identification texts, for example—masterly, outstanding, brilliant." He paused as if he had temporarily run out of adjectives and stared thoughtfully at the other. "You should take a refresher course, Marsh."

"To push papers across a desk?" enquired Marsh with some bitterness. He had reached maximum operable age two

years before and was still resentful about it. He began to doodle irritably on the blotter and changed the subject abruptly. " What exactly is Lessiter ?"

" I believe he describes himself as a psycho-criminologist, but, whatever flowery title he chooses, he's a damn brilliant man and we can use him. See that he's here within an hour."

Marsh rose tiredly. He had worked with Barton for years and was still trying to understand him. There was no doubt he was brilliant, but it was a brilliance which, at times, seemed to border on eccentricity. Here they were, knowing that somewhere—God knew quite where—aliens were loose on the planet and Barton was worrying about some expert or other who had written some outstanding books.

Marsh sighed inwardly. In all probability, Lessiter was senile, petulant and academic, more nuisance than he was worth. Barton, however, wanted him, therefore, he had to come even if it was on a stretcher. Marsh scowled, there were times when Barton infuriated him beyond measure. There was his annoying habit of keeping everyone in the dark while he worked on schemes of his own. If anything ever happened to him in the middle of a case, how the hell would his successor take up the reins ? Barton not only played it close to his chest, he kept half the cards up his sleeve. Questions, pointed, or otherwise, only induced a flow of withering sarcasm which left the questioner literally chastened. Despite this, Barton had a genius for making people like him. ' I like him,' thought Marsh, bitterly, ' maybe that's why I've never strangled him.'

Lessiter was a tall pale man with a gaunt face and a mouth which never quite closed. It gave him a chronic expression of aloof disdain which would have given anyone but Barton a feeling of inferiority.

" You have actual proof that this—ah—object landed ?" enquired Lessiter, politely.

Barton reached in a compartment of his desk. " We have three pictures of it." He tossed the photographs on the top of the desk. " Sheer luck we got them. Some scientific group or other were experimenting with a new type solar camera and got these shots by accident. The thing passed over three radar posts and didn't register so it seems that this camera may later prove quite a useful asset."

Lessiter studied the pictures carefully. " You have verified the authenticity of these prints ? The object bears a startling resemblance to an ancient gasometer."

" Gasometers, ancient or otherwise," said Barton meaningly, " are distinctly out of place at a hundred and ninety thousand feet. Further, it landed; landed and left. You can't land a thing that size without leaving marks and, by another stroke of good fortune, we found the marks. Members of my staff found footprints, to all intents and purposes human, leading away from the indentations left by the vessel. Careful photography and checks by experts lead us to suppose there were eleven." He paused. " Somewhere in the world are eleven somethings which are not human."

" You mean they may come from the stars ?"

Barton shrugged slightly. " We've reached Mars and Venus, so we know they didn't come from there. As far as I am concerned it is of no importance where they came from, my job is to find them and that is not going to be easy—eleven things which look human among all Earth's billions."

" An almost hopeless task, surely ?"

" Not quite so hopeless. One of our agents spotted one in London. He had just taken the complete type-identification training course and, presumably, he detected some mannerism or movement inconsistent for the type-physical. Anyway, he had a micro-telecamera concealed on his person and began to beam back pictures. Unfortunately, before the receptor screens had obtained proper focus, the agent died."

" Died ? "

" Died. Dried up and blew away. What was left of him could be carried in the palm of my hand. According to witnesses, he sat on a park bench as if tired and, almost literally, fell to pieces. Dust drifted down from his hands, part of his face was carried away by the breeze and then he seemed to fall in on himself and crumble away."

" You've no idea how it was done ?" Lessiter's face was pale.

Barton shook his head. " No one saw that part, they only saw him die."

Lessiter said, in a shaky voice : " Was this unfortunate agent actually searching for aliens at the time ?"

" Yes. We were basing our search on logic and using your own type-identification texts. That, incidentally, is why we sent for you, we need your experience." Barton paused. "We

are assuming that a man, or woman, outside your classification would be unusual—"

" It would be more than unusual, it would be impossible." Lessiter was suddenly animated. " A type A3 physique, for example, must have characteristic Class Ten gestures and walk. With the correct charts, the veriest amateur with only an elementary knowledge of anatomy can penetrate the most elaborate disguise, including such extreme methods as plastic surgery. You are quite correct in assuming that anything outside the classification would not be human."

Barton nodded. " Your book, *Techniques Of Logical Elimination*, is also extremely valuable, Mr. Lessiter." He paused, meaningly. " Of course, we have no power to conscript your help but, in a crisis of this kind—" He let the rest of the sentence and the implications, hang.

" But, of course." Lessiter was animated again. " I am completely at your service, but completely—"

" Good, good." Barton beamed. " We'll find you an office somewhere, the complete resources of this department are at your disposal and, of course, all pertinent data will be made available to you as soon as it comes to hand."

Marsh, who had been doodling absently on his desk blotter, frowned inwardly. Barton often laughed, smiled frequently, but seldom wore a smug beam. Marsh didn't like it, the beam usually meant that Barton was playing a long shot of his own and that meant everyone would be working in the dark for weeks wondering what the hell they were doing and why. Only the lucky field agents would have clear-cut duties to perform, walking around looking for aliens.

Lucien was a lithe dark man with quick nervous movements and bright bird-like eyes. He was dressed, at the moment, conservatively but with just that touch of flamboyance which, he felt, suited his purpose admirably. Lucien was playing wolf. He was looking at the girls with that touch of challenge which made his purpose unmistakable—to the casual observer. Lucien showed his white teeth and talked with his eyes impartially to blonde, brunette and redhead yet he missed nothing. An agent had died in this park, it was logical to assume the alien might return. A thing which looked human enough to pass in a crowd, would obviously seek sanctuary in a crowd.

At the far end of the park, a man called Match lay on the grass unshaven, apparently asleep but watching through half closed eyes. All over the world it was the same, alert agents in places where crowds thronged, looking, watching, waiting for the betraying gesture or movement which would brand them for what they were—non-human.

Lucien had passed Match twice and in a minute or so would pass him again but no sign of recognition passed between them, outwardly they were unaware of each other's existence.

Lucien showed his perfect teeth at a blonde and was rewarded with a flutter of eyelids and an obvious come-on but he had no time to follow up the invitation. In the distance, Match had rolled over and sat upright. Drowsily and convincingly he climbed to his feet, pushed back his greasy hat and scratched his head. The movement brought the tiny transmitter on his wrist level with his mouth. " Lucien, the tall—" The sentence choked suddenly to silence.

Lucien did not see how it was done, or who did it, there was no flash and no explosion. One minute Match was scratching his head, the next, he was staring stupidly at the bloody ruin of his chest. Then, with almost grotesque slowness, he sagged at the knees and pitched forward on his face.

Lucien felt the colour drain from his face but his trained reflexes kept him walking steadily on as if he had not yet observed the incident. It was only when a woman screamed piercingly and a man shouted that he turned and ran towards the gathering crowd. Match, of course, was dead before he hit the ground, Lucien realised that but the desire to go to his assistance had been almost overwhelming.

A tall—what ? Lucien was scanning the crowd even as he ran. Unless the alien was a complete fool he, too, would join the ring of morbid sightseers. He did, but it took Lucien almost a minute to spot him. The alien, like those about him, was straining to see over the heads of those in front but he was using the wrong movements to do it, furthermore he had forgotten to blink.

Lucien waited, hand ready on his gun until the alien, after an appreciable interval, detached himself from the crowd and walked slowly away. The agent watched him coming, presumably unsuspecting, otherwise he, too, would have died swiftly. Did the thing possess some instrument capable of

detecting micro-transmitters and other devices as soon as they were activated? It looked that way, both agents had died as soon as they tried to call. In any case, he was taking no chances. He waited until the thing was level and flicked off the safety catch of his regulation auto-pistol.

Fortunately Lucien was fast and was already grasping the gun in his pocket, but for that, it would have been too late.

The thing turned, it's hand moving in a blur of speed which was terrifying—

The heavy weapon in Lucien's hand coughed a brief gout of yellow flame. The heavy expanding slug caught the alien high in the chest and knocked it half over a park bench. Technically the shot should have killed it, the upper chest and shoulder were a shattered mess and the arm dangled limp and useless. Somehow the thing recovered its balance, tottered upright and clawed at its pocket with its remaining arm.

Lucien switched to automatic and kept his finger on the trigger. He watched the thing stagger, jerking under the impact of the shots but still trying to fight back. The thing stood until it was a tattered scarecrow, faceless, its chest caved in, almost falling in half, then suddenly it crumpled and fell sideways.

Lucien was still staring stupidly, the gun in his hand, at the widening pool of purple liquid when two policemen pinioned both his arms and a bystander kicked the weapon from his fingers.

Barton was not angry but he was faintly disapproving. "I see that it was pretty desperate, Lucien, and I know Match was a personal friend but you should have followed the thing, it might have lead you to the others. Now they know we're wise to them, have some means or method of recognising them."

Lucien rubbed the bruise where an over-zealous policeman had slapped him before he had produced his identity disc. "They knew that before, otherwise they wouldn't have killed the two men who tried to talk about it."

"Yes, yes, I'll grant you that, nevertheless they'll be more on their guard than ever now."

A white coated man came in and laid a paper on the desk. "That's a preliminary report. It's not human in any respect but it's been altered by some damn clever surgery to look like

us. A picture will be along in about three minutes, you'll see from that it's got a skeleton like a bird cage. There's a centrally situated semi-rigid bone with wire-like ribs radiating outwards." The white coated man sighed tiredly. " As far as we can tell it's a silicon life form but it can breathe our air. The thing has two hearts and a double circulatory system pumping two different liquids in opposite directions round its body. Don't ask me why, I'm half way up the wall already"

Barton said : " Is that the best you can do ?"

" It's the best I can do in an hour," said the other with some heat. " Maybe when Sneer-face has finished taking photographs, I can get around to furnishing a complete report."

Marsh's lips twitched, there was no mistaking who Mundy meant by ' Sneer Face.' " What is Mr. Lessiter doing ?" he enquired, mildly.

" Running round in circles with a camera." He turned angrily to Barton. " Why don't you give the man a deer-stalker hat ? He could be a real Sherlock then—on a purely amateur basis, of course."

Just then Lessiter came in, the expression of disdain heightened with triumph. " We managed to re-mould the face, then we shaved off the beard, come and look."

They crowded into the laboratory and Marsh, peering over Barton's shoulder, drew in his breath sharply. " My God—Senator Cleveland !"

Barton turned. " You missed that, Mundy, perhaps it is fortunate we employ amateurs when necessary."

Barton sipped his coffee and stared thoughtfully over the rim of his cup at the man opposite him. " Marsh, stop trying to doodle on the table cloth with a fork. If this was a respectable place instead of a service cafeteria we should have the management breathing down our necks. What's worrying you ? Out with it ?"

Marsh sighed. " I suppose it's Lessiter." He became suddenly irritable. " Damn it, I know he's good—he knows it, too, incidentally—but is it wise ?" The tension which had been building up in Marsh for some days suddenly took precedence and words tumbled from him. " I can't help feeling it's dangerous. This business is top secret, known only to the heads of state and Investigation. If things go against us, how do we know he won't crack up and talk ? He could

start a panic that way. Again, you've given him the run of the department which means he has access not only to our methods but to strictly hush-hush equipment. For all I know he may achieve miracles, become a national hero but after we turn him loose someone could pick him up. They could work him over and squeeze every drop of information out of him. He hasn't had the training, the background, the experience to get out of a situation like that or cut his own blasted throat, as we'd have to in similar situations, if things got too rough to bear."

" Marsh." Barton's voice was soft and faintly chiding. " Do you think I'd have pulled Lessiter in if I hadn't had him screened first ?"

Marsh said : " Oh !" uncomfortably. " I thought—"

" You thought I did it on impulse, I know, but don't worry, everything is neatly tied up." He paused to push aside his empty cup. " Try a little tolerance, Marsh, don't keep scowling at the man. I can assure you he's really brilliant and, further, he's promised us something really outstanding for tonight."

Lessiter lit a long cigar with some care, exhaled blue smoke and smiled. " Well, gentlemen, I think I may say we have the main difficulties tied up, all we need now is attention to the best methods to employ."

" Perhaps," said Barton, " you could begin at the beginning"

" Most certainly. All too obviously, they are here on an infiltration mission. The dead alien's resemblance to a famous senator is not accidental but deliberate. One day the senator would have gone out, something would have happened to him and, the alien, resembling him in every detail, would have returned in his place. By this method the aliens could'have gained key positions in the planet's administration with none being the wiser. No doubt, the other aliens resemble great statesmen, famous M.P.'s and like notabilities. Once installed, they could have dictated policy and prepared the way for a larger and more comprehensive infiltration. The people of Earth would have become a subject race and believed themselves free until it was too late to offer resistance." Lessiter paused to study the ash on his cigar absently.

' It must give them,' thought Marsh sourly, ' infinite satisfaction to lecture two high ranking Investigation officers.

Mundy was right, the man thought he was a Sherlock and all about him were obtuse and awe-struck Dr. Watsons.

" Please go on," said Barton, softly.

Lessiter nodded, exhaling smoke. " Having deduced their purpose here, and knowing we had a means of recognising them, the next logical step was to discover how they recognised us. It was natural to assume that a technically advanced race would be equipped with superior devices but somehow a receiver comprehensive enough to react to micro-telecamera, a transmitter and the sound of a safety catch being released was too much. The solution was reached by a process of elimination and proved by test. The answer is quite simple. The alien organ corresponding to the ear is singularly acute and infinitely superior to our own. The alien killed your first agent because it *heard* the telecamera, it *heard* the transmitter and, of course, already alerted by Match's call, was *listening* for some betraying sound. Your agent, Lucien, flicked off the safety catch of his weapon and the alien *heard* it."

Marsh, doodling as usual, said : " Excuse me, but isn't that a little far-fetched ?"

" I think not, it requires only the most modest pliability of mind to adjust to the alien viewpoint. If a creature depending primarily on vision for survival can be taught to *look* for danger signals and to recognise them why cannot a creature depending upon hearing be taught to listen for certain sounds and interpret them ? Obviously spies have been to Earth prior to the infiltration and again, obviously, instead of saying, as we would, *watch for*, they said : *listen for*." He turned to Barton. " Your own laboratory technicians will verify these facts. Tests have proved the alien vision poor but sonic tests prove their hearing organs unbelievably acute."

Barton nodded, quickly. " Quite so, quite so."

Marsh scowled and didn't care if Barton was watching. Lessiter had spoken down to him as if he were a third form schoolboy who asked a singularly stupid question.

" Got the outline now ?" asked Barton, rubbing salt into the wound.

" Yeah, yeah, I've got it." Marsh scowled at the blotter and wished himself elsewhere. He had an uneasy feeling that somehow something was wrong, no it was all wrong. Some-

how there was no sense of urgency, no feeling of danger, why the hell wasn't there ?

" Have you any solution to finding these aliens, Mr. Lessiter ?"

" Yes, Mr. Barton, I think I have. With the assistance of some of your technicians we have improvised a sonic device which should be foolproof. The instrument emits a jarring but fluctuating whistle which should drive the aliens into the open in less than a day. You see, the acute hearing of the aliens has weaknesses, certain sounds at certain wave-lengths are intolerable to them. As the instrument is of almost limitless range, I feel that we can, figuratively speaking, smoke them out in a matter of hours."

" I see." Barton opened the cigar box on his desk, studied the contents and shut it again absently. " You have, of course, with the assistance of my technicians, proved these facts by tests with alien nerve fibre ?"

" Most certainly."

" And the sound produced by this sonic device is audible to them but not to us because it is beyond the range of our hearing ?"

" Er—yes—yes—quite so."

Barton opened the cigar box again and selected a cigar. " The way you've got everything tied up in so short a time is remarkable, Mr. Lessiter, particularly the alien side of it. One might almost think,"—he paused and smiled—" you'd met up with them before." He laughed disarmingly. " But of course, you haven't, have you ?" He lit the cigar carefully and blew a fat, rather wobbly smoke ring. " It's the logic which surprises me but you can go wrong even with logic you know."

" I have made some mistake ?" Lessiter looked puzzled.

Barton's mouth smiled round the cigar. " Only one—you were too smart." He reached in a compartment and fished out a folder file. " Not so very long ago you were filling in your income driving an air taxi, the imposing " Consultant Psychiatrist " on the door wasn't bringing in much business yet "—he opened the file, "—you leapt to fame overnight with four volumes of Criminal-Psychology and three Physical Recognition Texts which, presumably, you wrote in four months." He closed the file carefully and pushed it to one side. " Somehow that's a little too brilliant. What did you

do with the original Lessiter before you took his place—kill him ?"

Lessiter swallowed. " This is some curious joke, perhaps ?"

Barton smiled. It was not exactly a pleasant grimace, almost it was a snarl. " You know, the situation reminds me of the two maggots who, believing they had a particularly juicy and exclusive apple, started to eat their way in from opposite sides. I am informed, on excellent authority, that there was quite a scene when they met in the middle."

" I don't see—" began Lessiter.

" Oh, but you do," cut in Barton harshly. " You see, because it happened on Althair II. A nice little class Five culture, ripe for the picking. Unfortunately, however, your nearest rivals had got there first and rubbed out your first assault wave like so many flies and, short of starting war, there was nothing you could do about it." He looked thoughtfully at the other. " Class Nine cultures have, of course, outgrown war but not their acquisitiveness or predatory instincts. If you people had your way, there'd be great sprawling empires all over the galaxy with slave-natives ignorant of their servitude, producing and working to make you stronger."

" Is this some curious fantasy you have invented for amusement ?" He looked calm but his fingers were twitching.

Barton sighed. " I'll have to take this right down to the bone, I see. All right, Mr. Lessiter, as you wish. It happened on Althair II but your people had no wish for history to repeat itself. They knew they were on to this juicy apple first because they'd checked but just in case another maggot came along later—" Barton pointed to Lessiter's books. " You thoughtfully provided the natives with recognition charts." He laughed briefly and without humour. " They could keep watch while you went on with your own work which was dumping your natty little hypnotic devices in various parts of the planet. When Invasion Day came, all you had to do was to throw a little switch and everyone would do what you wanted."

Lessiter's mouth worked and he suddenly dropped all pretence. " And now you play one against the other so that you can take over." His face was flushed and angry.

" We took over a long time ago, but your type of culture will never believe it until we explode in your faces. Haven't you ever heard of the Guardian Corps ?"

Lessiter sank heavily into the nearest chair. " The Guardian Corps !" His face was colourless. " Right out here !"

Barton shook his head tiredly. " Wherever there is a Class Five culture, there is the Guardian Corps. You should know that. God knows it's been repeated enough but you people always delude yourselves that you've found one we haven't reached." He banged his fist suddenly on the desk. " You people reached Class Nine, because the Class Twenty Cultures formed the Guardian Corps to take care of you. If you blow yourselves up in some of your damn silly wars, that's your business although, incidentally, a lot of our people have been blown up with them. We are not organised to aid or guide a culture but to protect from outside interference at a critical stage of development." He rose. " We've had trouble with both of your cultures before, this time it will be something more than a warning."

Lessiter's face twitched, his mouth opened and shut but no sound came out. He produced a cigarette case and fumbled at it with trembling fingers.

" I shouldn't." Barton's voice was sharp and authorative but it was too late.

There was a crackling sound as if someone had crushed a small wooden box and Lessiter pitched forward holding his head.

" Don't touch him." Barton waved Marsh to one side. " Unfortunately, he's liable to fall to pieces." He bent down and retrieved the cigarette case. " Nasty little weapon. His people call them splinter guns. Actually it's a sonic device keyed to the skeleton structure—press the firing stud and the bones shatter like glass inside the flesh." He shook his head slowly. " He should have known better ; trying to kill a Guardian is suicide. There isn't a weapon a Class Nine culture can conceive which we can't reflect back at the user. He should have known that, the damn fool."

Marsh put a cigarette between his lips and forgot to light it. " And just how did *you* get here ?"

Barton laughed softly. " Well, I didn't have to kill anyone. Creating a background with records to back it is easy enough and we have rather advanced hypno-techniques. You'd be surprised at the number of people who remember me in my home village as a boy." He turned and pressed a button on

his desk. " Mundy, we've got a corpse up here, be a good chap and remove it, will you ?" He turned to Marsh again. " You're worrying again," he said, gently. " There's really no need, we can pick the other invaders up tomorrow." He chuckled. " Two birds with one stone—I like that." He turned towards the door. " Let's go and have a coffee."

Marsh rose uncertainly. " But—"

" Stop worrying, I told you we had advanced hypnotechniques and you will remember only—"

Marsh returned to his desk some twenty minutes later and sat down frowning. He had an irritating feeling that he had forgotten something important but was unable to recall what it was. Let's see, what had he been thinking ? Ah, yes—where did this thing *end* ? Where did what thing end, for God's sake ?

He looked at his blotter and the frown deepened into a scowl. Barton was always telling him that doodling was a sign of nervous disorder, obviously, he was right.

Among the vague sketches, the pin men, the designs, were the words, in his own clear writing, *Guardian Alien.* Now, what the hell did that mean ?

Philip E. High

THE DIFFERENT COMPLEXION

Author William Temple never has been a prolific writer but over the past twenty years practically every one of his stories has been of high quality. Usually, too, there has been a clever but minor idea in each, but extremely relative to the plot. Like the Martian colour sense in this particular story.

By WILLIAM F. TEMPLE

Back on Earth, Burns had seen a strikingly coloured drawing of Pacy City, man-made oasis in the red deserts of Mars. Its shining plastic dome, arching four hundred feet into the thin air, had been sliced open to show the thirty floor levels, a human honeycomb of offices, machine shops, laboratories, canteens, bars, and streamlined living quarters.

It looked like a Brighton luxury hotel. It also looked like an ideal refuge for a man with a broken heart. A man who wanted to get away from it all.

Well, he had got away : fifty millions of miles away. And here he was, standing on the site of the dream city. Unfortunately, Pacy City was still mostly site and mostly dream.

Like Verulanium.

His teacher had said, hushedly: "This is the famous Romano British city of Verulanium. Can't you just see it all ? The

great villas, the public baths, the chariots clattering along the paved streets . . ."

The schoolboy Burns looked at Verulanium and saw a lot of ditches.

The man Burns looked at Pacy City and saw a lot of ditches.

Chief Engineer Dodge looked at Pacy City and saw a lot of sewers. He began to talk sewers to his new assistant. And for months afterwards Burns lived sewers. He used his brief, rare breathing spaces to reflect what a romantic fool he'd been. Was any woman, however beautiful, really worth this slavery in exile? Why martyr himself merely because Sarah loved money and men, in that order?

Once a month he had a day's leave. He spent it with Dodge in the city which *did* exist, at Solis Lacus. In the rose-lit bar he complained about gold-diggers.

"Just because this fellow Moore was born with a silver Cadillac in his mouth . . ."

"The women of Earth," said the older man, over his iced scotch, "are female dogs. Find yourself a Martian."

"A wog?" said Burns, distastefully.

Dodge frowned. "Maybe your girl threw you over because you're plain ill-bred, Burns. The Martians are civilized. We're not . . . you're not, anyway."

"You're implying I'm lower in the social scale than a black-faced ditch-digger?"

"*Brown*-faced," Dodge corrected. "And if they labour for us, it's only because they're good neighbours. No Martian *has* to work. But we do—or go hungry."

Burns knew little about Martians. The only books he'd read were engineering text-books. He'd only once visited a Martian village. It had no tavern, so he didn't stay longer than to wonder why the stucco-fronted sandstone houses were all painted different colours. The Martians all wore differently coloured robes, also. Did the red-robed ones live in the red houses, the yellow-robes in the yellow houses, and so on?

Certainly the Martians needed some colour in their lives. They were the drabbest-looking crowd, physically, you ever saw.

Every Martian seemed to have the same face—a shapeless leather pouch of a face, with narrow dark-brown eyes lost among the dark-brown creases. The mouth was only just another crease, but their teeth were white and they grinned a

lot. Mere flesh blobs passed for noses. Their hair was coarse and spiky—and brown, of course.

Everyone looked old, whatever their age, even the children. And it was almost impossible to distinguish the sexes, by sight.

"The Martians," said Burns, with a little shudder, "repel me."

"Doubtless the repulsion is mutual," Dodge grunted. "For myself, I get along with 'em very well. As a matter of fact, from now on I'll be staying quite often at the house of a Martian friend of mine."

And so he did. He slept out two or three nights a week. Burns felt lonelier than ever. He became sick of the sight of the countless Y-junctions and T-junctions under the cloudless sky. The cool, damp wind from the melting polar cap died and he began to suffer from the heat.

He longed eagerly for the relief of leave day in Solis Lacus. When it dawned, Dodge was still absent, on a visit to his Martian friend. Burns didn't fancy drinking alone at Solis. Dodge had been growing very tense of late, but drink usually mellowed and relaxed him, and they'd had some good long talks.

Burns decided to look for him. He headed the air-driven runabout for the nearest Martian village. The truant was chair-lounging on the verandah of a pale blue house, smoking.

"Hi, Chief! Have you forgotten it's our day to go to town?"

Dodge exhaled smoke. "So it is. Well, it doesn't matter. I'll skip it this time. I like it here."

A Martian in a pale blue robe glided from the doorway behind him. He or she—to Burns the figure was just another compost of mud and leather—laid a crystal bowl of brightly wet fruit on Dodge's lap and withdrew.

"Like some?" asked Dodge, examining it.

"No, thanks," said Burns, shortly, irritable with disappointment. "Who was that?"

"All Martian names are unpronounceable. I call her Rowena—it sounds a bit like that. She owns this house and most of my old hard heart."

"Is she the reason you've been sleeping out?" asked Burns, incredulously.

Dodge bit a banana in two with one snap. The vicious click of his teeth betrayed the tension behind his assumption of ease.

" Spring is icumen in," he said. " And it may come early. I like it here. You like it at Solis Lacus. Go your ways. Have a dry martini for me and give my regards to Pat. Goodbye."

" But— "

" This palaver is finished. Good*bye*."

Burns drove away fast. The runabout was unhappy at top speed and hissed and puffed indignantly. But Burns kept his foot hard down all the way. At Solis Lacus he lifted it, only to press it down again three minutes later on the rail beneath the bar. He kept it pressed for an hour, then it grew limp and presently slid off and dangled loosely.

By now he was quite relaxed and had forgiven Dodge for deserting him, for going native, and for being his boss in the first place. Indeed, he almost became tolerant of the human race. He deigned to notice the specimen of it sitting at his elbow.

" I've been waiting for you to get your nose out of that brandy glass," said Melton Moore, morosely. " Matter of fact, I wasn't really sure it was you, though Pat said it was."

Pat was the barman.

And Melton Moore was Sarah's new boy friend, who had replaced Burns in her favour.

Burns looked him up and down with the deliberation of the near-drunk. He permitted himself grave astonishment.

" How the devil did you get here, Melty ? Where did you park the Cadillac ?"

" Dad claimed it back," said Moore, gloomily, " as part of the assets for his creditors. A drop in the ocean. He owes half a million. He sold the wrong stock and was caught short. My own creditors ran me hard. I came here to hide."

" Well well, these are small worlds. Have a drink ?"

" I've been waiting for that, too. I'm really skinned. Double scotch, if you don't mind."

" First," said Burns, with alcoholic firmness, " how about Sarah ?"

" She won't need one. She's not here."

" You know what I mean. How do things stand between you now ?"

" They don't. I'm out like you. You know Sarah—no dollars, no dice."

Burns giggled. " One thing you've got to admit about our Sarah : she's consistent. Pat—double scotch and a double brandy."

Quite a few drinks later, at Burns' expense, Moore said indistinctly : " Thanks in advance for the hangover . . . So you can make really good money on Mars ?"

" That's what I said. They've got to pay the limit to persuade people to come to this God-forsaken Sahara in space in the first place, and then double it to persuade 'em to stay on. And, best of all, it's tax free. You keep all you earn. I'm coining it, Melty, I really am."

" Better be careful, boy. If you go on like that, Sarah will start getting interested in you again."

" Love me, love my dollars !" Burns snorted, reflected, and then asked half-seriously : " D'you think she might, Melty ?"

" It's quite on the cards, boy. She used to really go for you, you know. She used to annoy me by talking of you too often. She kept rubbing it in how much better-looking you were than me. Said it was your complexion that attracted her most. I'm a bit spotty. Never was one for the open air and all that."

Burns smirked at his image in the rose mirror behind the bar. It was a wavering image, for everything was becoming pretty blurred at the edges.

" Can you use your influence to get me one of these well-paid jobs, old boy ?" asked Moore, going off at a tangent.

" You want to *work*, Melty ?"

" No, but I've got to drink, haven't I ? Any kind of a job—I'll dig ditches."

" You will ? Then I'll get you a job tomorrow—digging ditches. For a worthy purpose, I can assure you. 'S'cuse me, I must go and write a letter."

He'd reached the stage of alcoholic optimism where almost any idea sparkled like a brainwave. He wrote to Sarah, four scrawled sheets of flimsy space-letter paper, and mailed them.

Next morning, of course, the idea had lost its sparkle. It shone like a lump of lead and seemed to weigh as heavily on his mind. He'd made a fool of himself over Sarah again. No

good trying to retrieve the letter : the early morning mail-rocket had already borne it 50,000 miles into space.

He was depressed all day. Even the sight of Melton Moore, afflicted with headache and backache, dismally poking among the sewer pipes at the site, with a shovel, didn't cheer him. Indeed, it was saddening. The jealousy was gone. Melty was only another outcast like himself.

Chief Engineer Dodge didn't show up till five days later. He was in a bad mood. He was edgy and impatience crackled from him electrically. For one thing, his conscience was troubling him about the time he'd lost, and he drove Burns like a mule to make it up for him.

For another—

" Something's gone wrong with the weather," he growled, glaring at the sky, which glared back at him with blue heat. " Spring has got lost this year."

It seemed to the sweating Burns that it had indeed, and high summer had jumped the gun. Day after day, as he toiled round the site with Dodge's irritating nag buzzing in his ear from the walkie-talkie, the sun fried him alive. He'd never known such intensity of radiation. The sheer pressure of it seemed to be beating him into the ground.

Melty Moore endured a week and in a state of collapse returned to Solis Lacus.

His parting words were a croak : " I've got a better job : cleaning the cuspidors in the bar. Look me up sometime."

Burns nodded, and that slight movement made his head throb again.

Dodge was driving the remains of Moore back. He had some parting words too. " I'm staying overnight at Solis, Burns. Don't slack. Remember, you've a lot of time to make up."

Burns watched the runabout shrink in the distance, become a speck near the bare horizon. There was a heat shimmer over the desert. The speck danced in it, then seemed to break into two specks, which jigged together. Then they sub-divided also, and again, and again . . .

The quivering air looked to be full of dancing black specks, multiplying rapidly. They began to move towards him like a cloud of locusts, spreading and blotting out the sun.

The dark cloud grew apace, smothering everything, choking him . . .

He felt himself collapsing but was unconscious before his shoulders hit the sand.

He came out of it slowly, aware of the coolness against his forehead before anything else. When his eyes could focus properly, he found the coolness was the hand of a Martian who was stooped over him. He shuddered with revulsion and tried to sit up, pushing the hand aside.

The effort made his head feel as though it would burst. He lay back and gasped. The persistent hand returned to cool his hot forehead. This time he was almost glad of it. This outdid the worst hangover he'd ever had.

A voice, cool and soothing as the hand, spoke with the slightest of accents. " Don't try to sit up yet. You must relax and lie still."

It wasn't like the unmusical growl of the Martian labourers and Burns realised it was a woman's voice. He stared blurrily at her. She wore a pale blue robe.

" Aren't you Rowena ?" he whispered.

" Yes, I'm Rowena, the friend of your Mr. Dodge. He will be coming to see you today."

She busied herself at a table, then turned and held a glass to his lips. " Drink this slowly."

He drank. It was whisky, near drowned in soda water and thick with little icebergs, but it tasted like nectar. He finished it and felt a lot better.

" That's real medicine," he said, appreciatively.

She smiled. The even row of white teeth looked dazzling in the dirty-seeming brown and leathery face. " Sick people should be given what they really like, not just things that are supposed to be good for them."

" If only all nurses were as sensible as you !"

The smile continued as she asked : " Now, what would you like to eat ?"

He named the impossible—eggs and bacon—and got them. Rowena explained that she had long studied Earth-type cooking and kept a varied supply of imported food to please her friend, Mr. Dodge. She had studied to some advantage —the eggs and bacon were just right. Burns finished them, beginning to suspect that Dodge might have had a good reason after all, for going native.

He looked critically around the room. The Martian civilisation was a deal less primitive than he had imagined. For

instance, the whitely translucent window was of some material unknown to him. The sunlight which came through it was somehow scattered and dispersed evenly to every corner of the room—there were no shadows.

The walls were glassy and living colours seemed to exist *behind* them, giving an odd three-dimensional effect, as if the room were hewn out of solid crystal.

He discovered he was between silk sheets. The carpet was as green as an Irish bog, and it looked as though you could sink just as deeply into it.

Why should people who lived in luxury dig ditches? Or was Rowena's house an exception?

Dodge came that afternoon, and it was the first thing Burns asked him.

Dodge said: "Rowena's is much the best house in the village, I can tell you that. Why? Because she's an aristocrat. The Martian social layers are as rigid as stratified rock. But it's considered a breach of etiquette even to discuss them. The subject is taboo."

"What decides the difference in the social layers? Breeding? Brains? Money?"

Dodge shrugged. "A bit of each, I expect. But there *is* something more. What it is I've never discovered. I've often wondered about it. I asked Rowena once, but she sidestepped. Who cares, anyway? It doesn't affect us. The Martians look at things quite differently from us."

Burns pondered, then said: "How did I get here? How long have I been here? What hit me, anyway?"

"Some villagers found you and brought you here—three days ago. You've been in a coma all that time. What hit you were ultra-violet rays. There have been unusually large gaps in the Violet Layer lately, letting them pour through—I told you the weather was going haywire. You've been out in the open a lot and got sunstroke."

"What's the Violet Layer?"

Dodge looked at him and the impatience came hot in his eyes again. Burns thought he detected, also, an added quality—resentment. The Chief was really wound up inside about something.

Dodge snapped: "You're the most crassly ignorant man, outside your job, that I've ever met. Haven't you ever read *anything*?"

He'd coloured up with bitter anger. There was an ugly twist to his lips. Then he regained control, and muttered: "Sorry, Burns. Shouldn't bite your head off when you're feeling so lousy. I'm just het up over one thing and another. Too much work these days—I've missed your help."

"That's all right, Chief. I'll be back on the job in a couple of days."

Dodge looked at him for a long second completely without expression, and then, in a matching colourless voice, said: "The existence of the Violet Layer was known nearly a century ago by the old earthbound astronomers, before anyone got to the moon, let alone to Mars. It's a layer of ice crystals about eight miles up. It blocks a lot of the short-wave radiation from the sun, which the atmosphere itself is too thin to screen. But sometimes atmospheric conditions go screwy and the Layer cracks like an ice-floe, and the radiation, including the ultra-violet, comes through the cracks in force. At such times it's not wise to stay out in the midday sun. When you've had a dose as stiff as the one you had, the only cure is rest—in bed. At least a fortnight of it."

"A fortnight! I can't lie around here that long, with nothing to do. I'd go up the wall."

Dodge gnawed a knuckle and looked gloomy. "There's no option. No-one's got time to nurse you night and day at the site."

"No need for that; there's a hospital ward at Solis. At least I'd have some company there."

"Sorry—no can do."

"Why not, for heaven's sake? You took Moore there, didn't you?"

"I know. But Rowena wants to look after you till you're well. She's a good nurse. She's a good everything, including good company—I can promise you that."

"For you, maybe. Not for me. I prefer my own kind. Get me out of here, Chief—please."

Dodge flared up again. "I wish like hell I could! As far as I'm concerned you're just in the way here. I was doing fine. This place had become a home from home for me. It beats me why Rowena wants you to stay. I had to promise to let you."

"Why? What hold does she have over you?"

Dodge gnawed his reddening knuckle again. "She's got nothing on me. I just want to stay good friends with her, that's all. I like it here, even if you don't."

" I like it better at Solis," said Burns, sullenly.

" You'll like it better still there in a fortnight's time. That's when they're opening the new casino. You'll be able to gamble your salary away at roulette every month regularly."

Burns was interested. " They're opening that soon ? I've got a system at roulette . . ."

Dodge let him talk. He'd achieved his aim : drawn Burns' attention away from the subject of Rowena.

When Dodge left, Burns was feeling more cheerful. There was something to look forward to on his recovery. Sewers might be endurable so long as there was a chance of winning a fortune and getting away from them for ever.

His cheerfulness continued through the next few days. For Rowena was everything Dodge had claimed for her.

She was attentive, sympathetic, serene and restful. Withal, she had a sly wit. She could talk interestingly both of commonplace matters and abstruse ones. Unlike Burns, she was widely read.

If Burns was in the mood—and she sensed his moods amazingly—she would play and sing for him. She played a Martian instrument not all that different from a Spanish guitar, and she sang in a clear, sweet voice that glided to top notes without strain. Sometimes she demonstrated slow and graceful Martian traditional dances.

She was almost touchingly eager to please.

Burns presently called her his little geisha girl, though she was rather taller than he.

One day, after she'd sung some ancient song that somehow reached the heart of the not exactly musical Burns, he began impulsively : " If only you— "

He broke off. He'd nearly said : " If only you were as beautiful as your voice."

She waited, then asked : " If only I— ? "

" If only you could cook," he said, foolishly.

She was crestfallen. " Oh, dear, I thought you liked my cooking."

" I do. It's marvellous," he said, truthfully, and added less truthfully : " I was only using one of our common sayings. It's a sort of joke. It means that you're very good at everything you do."

" Most things, perhaps," she said, and sighed. " But I'm a very poor teacher of languages."

She was alluding to her attempts to teach Burns the fundamentals of Martian. Burns had suggested it to pass the time.

" No, you're not. It's just that I'm a very poor pupil," said Burns, and was one hundred per cent truthful this time. " Get a book, Rowena. Let's have another try."

She brought a book Burns hadn't seen before. Its cover was all the colours of the rainbow merging into one another. He opened it. There were no illustrations, but the same formless merging of colours ran through all the pages. And the printed characters themselves were as varicoloured as the pages.

" What's the idea, Rowena ?"

" This is a famous Martian novel called *The Dream of Deimos*. It's about a poet who— "

" I mean, what's the idea of the colour scheme ? "

" Oh, that is used in all Martian novels and books of poetry —to convey mood. We Martians are very colour-conscious, you know. For instance, here is a descriptive passage about little white clouds sailing across the blue sky. And so here the type is white on sky-blue paper . . . it suggests something of the visual impression. That's a very ordinary example. See these stabs of scarlet print : the hero is angry. We think of anger as scarlet."

" Oddly, so do we. ' Seeing red,' as we put it. But what on earth does *that* mean ?"

Burns indicated the closing page of a chapter.

At the head of the page the type was black on grey paper. The grey became steadily darker as one read down the page, until the type was difficult to perceive against the darkening background. Near the bottom of the page they merged into a common blackness.

Rowena explained : " Those are the thoughts passing through the mind of the hero as he drifts off to sleep. They fade into unconsciousness. The ultimate deep black signifies night."

" Clever," commented Burns, " but surely only a gimmick."

He had to define this near-archaic term.

Rowena shook her head. " It is not just a gimmick. It is a natural feature of Martian thinking and feeling. Your own artists have it to some extent, but not in the same degree. For the most part Earth people lack the colour sense just as we lack your money sense. I'm afraid the subtleties will be quite lost on you."

Nevertheless, leafing through the novel, she tried to show how the colour pattern was a visual echo of every nuance of feeling : the abrupt alternations for indecision, the gloomy shades of grey for depression, the rosy and golden periods of happiness, the green spaces of meditation, and so on.

Then Burns attempted to draw Earthly parallels—rose-tinted spectacles and golden days and grey days—but had to admit that these were vague and crude apprehensions in comparison with the complex and exact system of Martian colour values.

Privately, when he thought about it afterwards, he wondered how far this necessity for colour in Martian life was compensation for the lack of it in their drab bodies. They were nice people, highly civilised, and it was a shame that he couldn't forget the ugliness behind the gay robes and striking the discordant note in the symphonies of their houses.

Beauty of mind and character wasn't quite satisfying enough. Doubtless his soul was too small, too earthy. Towards the end of the second week, his cheerfulness was on the wane. He wanted something, and it was not here. He was becoming as restless as Dodge, whose visits were few and brief.

He discovered himself deliberately avoiding looking at Rowena's unseemly face as she talked, and sometimes not even listening to her.

And, of course, she sensed that, and fell silent, and that made him feel like a heel.

He had made up his mind to return to work, when the letter came—Sarah's reply.

" *It was a nice surprise to hear from you. You should never have gone away . . . Melty was one of my mistakes, and now I feel it was another to let you go . . . You were quite the best-looking of my beaux . . . Glad to hear you're making good money on Mars—suggest you invest some of it in a five-minute vi-call to me. If we can see each other again it may be that we'll want to get together again. If you feel like experimenting, I'll be at home on the evening of the fifth of May, Earth-calendar . . .* "

As Burns read the letter a second time, it seemed to him that he'd developed a colour-sense as acute as any Martian's. The world about him had quite suddenly become all bright, glowing colour, charged with hope and expectancy.

He realised that what he was missing most was what every marooned man on Mars was denied : the sight of, the contact with, living feminine beauty.

Sarah was a bitch, but a beautiful one. A mean soul dwelling in the body of a goddess. It was unfortunate that unsubtle, single-purposed Nature designed man so that his glands weren't stirred in the least by a beautiful soul, but could drive him nearly crazy in reaction to a beautiful female form.

But there it was.

The fifth of May was only a week away. He would have to book his vi-call at once : five days was the minimum notice. An interplanetary vi-call was a tricky major operation. A whole corps of engineers had to work to keep the beam steady as it travelled millions of miles under ionic bombardment from the unpredictable sun.

Consequently, it was expensive. Very. Each minute would swallow close to a month's salary, Burns reflected. Five minutes would eat up all his savings. But, in his inflamed state, he judged a five minute tete-a-tete with Sarah a bargain at any price.

The village had no communication with anywhere. He would have to go to the site to book his call and to Solis to take it on the vi-caller.

When Dodge came next day, Burns told him : " Take me back with you. I'm fit for work again."

Dodge said : " Glad to hear it." And he looked glad.

Rowena was not glad. She was subdued. She asked : "You'll come and see me—often ?"

" Oh, I'll be seeing you, I expect," said Burns, evasively.

" Of course you will," said Dodge, expansive and hearty again.

Rowena made no comment, by word or expression. Her face remained as communicative as a mud-pack.

As the runabout left the village island in the desert far behind, an odd sensation came over Burns : a sad, aching feeling like he had long ago when he left home for the boarding school. His eyes watered. He rubbed them and cursed the weakness the sunstroke had bequeathed him.

Directly he reached the site he booked his call. As he had to use the office radio, there was no chance of hiding his intention from Dodge.

Dodge, of course, had heard all about Sarah, in the times when he and Burns had drunk in company. He commented : " I really hope you two get together again." It was plain that he really did.

Next day, he said : " I'll be spending the night at Rowena's. I'll give her your regards."

Burns hesitated. " Look," he said, haltingly, " I've never told Rowena about Sarah. I'd be obliged if you didn't mention her, either."

Dodge looked disappointed. " Why not ? What does it matter ?"

Burns could find no answer.

Dodge watched him. He said with a rough edge to his voice : " Just what are you up to, Burns ? Trying to run with the hare and the hounds ? If it turns out to be nix with your old girl friend, don't get any ideas about going back to Rowena's place and sitting with your feet on her mantelpiece. That's my chimney corner. You keep out of it."

Burns mumbled : " It's nothing like that. I just wouldn't like Rowena to know what sort of fool Sarah makes of me."

A pause.

" I see," said Dodge. " Well, all right."

He was away three days and nights. Burns had to carry on alone, and although the weather was cooler the long, hard days in the sun exhausted him.

Then Dodge came back. His eyes were despairing, and no apology was likely from that set mouth.

He greeted the tired Burns : " You foul little swine ! I curse the day I gave you this job. Well, I hired you and I can fire you. So you're fired. Get your things and get out."

Burns sagged under the shock. Sarah would have no time for him if he lost his job.

He stammered : " What have I done ? What's the matter?"

" You were born. You exist. That's what's the matter." Dodge was grinding his teeth at him. " And you have baby blue eyes. By heaven, I'll change their colour for you."

His fist came up, caught Burns in the right eye and knocked him flat.

In proper health, Burns would have shown fight. Not now. Physically weakened, terribly tired, and dazed by the shock of dismissal, he just lay there, dumb and numb. Dodge strode away, soon returning to fling Burns' possessions into the runabout.

Burns climb to his feet, protesting.

Dodge loomed over him like a thundercloud. " Shut up and get in."

Burns shut up and got in the runabout. Dodge drove off madly and the runabout puffed in hysteria. They made record time to Solis, and Dodge disappeared straight into the bar.

Burns dragged himself and his things to a room, bathed his painfully swollen eye, and fell into bed and a sleep of exhaustion.

Next morning he awoke at a couple of minutes past eleven. He blinked at his watch—and remembered. His vi-call was due in precisely eight minutes. He'd been allotted a five-minute slice of a sardine-tight schedule. If he didn't show up, nothing could be changed—not even the bill. He'd have to re-book, and pay a second time—which was impossible.

He dressed somehow and reeled away to the distant vi-call booth. He just made it.

The big, bright screen lit up as he opened the door, and there was Sarah's head and shoulders, twice as large as life and seemingly as three-dimensional. Her dress was so far off the shoulder that it wasn't visible at all. She might have been naked. But whether she had dressed for the occasion or not, it was obvious she'd spent a lot of time on her hair-do and make-up. She looked dazzling, perfection, more beautiful even than Burns' memory had painted her.

He regarded her, breathless from his rush.

She had parted her lips in a prepared smile. The smile died.

"My . . . God!" she said.

She stared at him between perplexity and anger.

"It *is* you . . . ?" She was one big frown.

He made an inarticulate sound, more gasp than anything.

"For heaven's sake put your tongue back in," she snapped. "You look like a frightened lap-dog . . . It *is* you? What on earth's happened to you? Your hair—it used to be such a nice red."

He passed his fingers dazedly through his hair. It was wild, uncombed. He hadn't had time to shave or even to wash. He cursed himself for not having tried to do something about his hair. The ultra-violet rays had bleached it patchily: it had become a pale, sandy, lifeless colour, streaked with white. It also needed cutting.

"Where did you get that black eye? Another drunken brawl? Those ghastly spots all over your face! You've

ruined your complexion, you fool ! What's become of your eyelashes ? And don't you shave these days ? Do you wash only around your mouth ? You look damn-awful. You look like a circus clown who's fallen down a chimney. What a spectacle !"

" Sarah—"

" If that's what Mars has done for you, we're back to where we were—finished. I'd hoped for the best, but this— ! This puts a different complexion on things . . . By heaven, a different complexion is right ! "

She began to laugh, a jeering laugh with an undertone of hysteria.

" Sarah," he tried again, but the harsh laughter filled the booth, so that he scarcely heard himself.

He looked at her silently and she didn't seem beautiful now. The spite glittered in her eyes and the maliciously laughing lips had an ugly twist.

A responding hate blazed up in him. " You . . . go to hell !" he shouted, stumbled out of the booth and slammed it shut. The sound-proof door guillotined the caustic, wounding laughter.

The interlude had lasted for one minute. The next four minutes would tick away in the empty booth the earnings of four months of toil. Yet he would rather slave another four months for nothing than remain one more minute on the other side of that door.

He wandered off without aim, and presently discovered himself in a washroom, staring miserably into a mirror. He took the first real good look at himself since his illness, and could understand something of Sarah's disappointment and derision.

The sun never treats kindly the complexion of red-haired people. The overdose of ultra-violet had wreaked havoc on Burns's. A thick rash of freckles, so dark as to appear almost black, overspread his face. He looked like a case of plague. His eyelashes had whitened and were all but invisible. His air baffled description.

A dirty yellowish tan did nothing to help. It threw into relief the white patch around his mouth, where the oxygen mask had fitted and blocked the sun's rays. And one ear was noticeably whiter than the other because of the walkie-

talkie ear-piece he'd worn for so long on the job. The black eye was the final ludicrous touch.

The ensemble reminded him of a scruffy mongrel, with one white ear, a white muzzle, and a black patch round one eye.

He didn't know whether to laugh bitterly, like Sarah, or cry as bitterly.

One thing he did know : he needed a drink.

He found his way to the rose-lit, luxurious bar which had so gladdened his heart when he first came to Mars—years ago, it seemed. Apart from Pat, the barman, only two people were there : Dodge and Melton Moore.

Dodge was sunk in alcoholic gloom. Moore was glowing with alcoholic bonhomie.

Dodge ignored everyone. Moore made an attempt to shake hands with Burns, but somehow the intention got lost on its wavering way.

Thickly, but genially, he exclaimed : " Why, it's old Burnsey come t' buy me 'nother drink ! Make it scotch, boy."

Burns reached in his pocket, found he'd no money on him, remembered there was precious little in the bank and no prospect of earning any more. His spirit hit a new low.

He mumbled : " Sorry, Melty. 'Fraid the drinks are on you."

" Any time, boy, any time." Moore ordered two double scotches. He ignored Dodge loudly. " Shan't buy *him* one. He's been here all night too and won't even say hello. Blasted stuck-up slave-driver. Why, I could buy him ten times over ! I broke the bank last night, Burnsey. A hundred and fifty thousand smackers they paid out—to me. Just to me. I'm r-rich beyond the dreams of avar—avar—'ave another drink, boy. Pat, keep my friend here happy. "

Happy !

Burns downed the scotch in a single gulp.

" So you're on top of the world again, Melty ?"

" S'right. Have another."

Burns had another, and began to feel better.

" Now Sarah will be interested in you again, Melty."

" I hope so, boy, I hope so. But you're the st-stumbling block. She likes money but she likes you, too."

" I've just been talking to her on the vi-caller. It was her idea we discussed getting together again."

" Oh." Moore looked into his untouched drink, and his gaiety evaporated. " Does she look the same as ever ?"

" Exactly. D'you know what I told her, Melty ?"

With a flash of jealous anger, Moore snapped : " How could I, you bloody fool ? I wasn't there."

" I told her you were the best man for her. I told her she ought to take you back and I certainly wouldn't stand in your way."

Moore looked up, startled. A foolish beam spread over his foolish face.

" Oh, Burnsey ! What did she say ?"

" Never mind. But I'll tell you this : she'll take you back."

Moore lurched off his stool. " I'm going to b-book a call to her, right now. Thanks a lot, Burnsey. Would you like one for the road ?"

" I'd like one for the end of the road. I've reached it."

" Have a bottle," said Moore, generously, and bought one. He weaved out of the bar.

Burns picked up the bottle, then became aware of Dodge's brooding eyes watching him.

" C'mere," said the Chief Engineer, hoarsely.

Burns went along to him, clutching his bottle.

" I heard all that," said Dodge. He'd drunk himself sober again. Although his brain was working slowly, it was clear. " So she turned you down."

" Flat," said Burns, opening the bottle.

" And now you want to go and cry on Rowena's shoulder ?"

Burns paused, and realised that that was exactly what he felt like doing. " Yes," he said.

" Then go and do it," said Dodge, surprisingly. " It's a comfortable shoulder for crying on. I know."

Burns stared at him. " But you said—"

" Forget what I said. It's over between Rowena and me. I haven't got a hope in hell of really getting anywhere. She made it clear on my last visit. My eyes are the wrong colour."

" What do you mean ?"

" Rowena's an aristocrat. According to the unbreakable Martian code, her consort must also be an aristocrat."

Burns gave a harsh laugh. " That let's me out, too."

" On the contrary, you're a born aristocrat. Born with a silver spoon in your mouth and a coronet on your brow."

" What *are* you talking about ?"

Dodge sighed. " I'd never realised before to what an incredible extent colour governs Martian life. The gradations

and niceties escape us purblind Earth folk, but as a rough yardstick to the social layers you can take the spectrum. The violet-blue at one end represents the serene spiritual heights, suggesting the blue of the sky, the Violet Layer. The deep red at the other end is identified with the lowest level, ground level, the red desert, the base passions of anger and hate. Something like that, anyway."

"But I have red hair—used to have red hair . . ."

"Hair's not really important. The eyes have it. To a Martian, the eyes are the divinely implanted badges of rank—heaven-bestowed pips, crowns, stars, what have you. Seems damn silly to me but our own world's just as mad concerning distinctions. Your eyes are blue, sonny, practically violet-blue—the highest grade. Mine are a mucky reddish-brown. I'm outside the pale. I could remain 'a good friend,' but never become anything more. Rowena was very nice about it. Very delicate, tactful, sympathetic, hated to hurt me. And because she's like that, I realise all the more what I'm losing. A heart means more than a face, any day."

"I've always known that, really," said Burns, slowly, "but the flesh is weak . . . I still don't get it, though. Rowena wears blue, lives in a blue house, but those outward trappings surely aren't enough to make her an aristocrat.? I don't get it at all. All Martians look the same. Their eyes are the same colour, which really isn't a colour at all."

"You'll learn better," said Dodge, cryptically. "It's spring, and I need a woman who couldn't care a curse about the colour of my eyes. I'm going back to Earth. You're next in line for my job. It's yours, as from now. The runabout's yours. I'm not leaving this bar till the next ship takes off for Earth."

Burns sat silent, absorbing this sudden reversal of fortune.

"I'm going to Rowena," he said, abruptly. "I can't give you anything in return, Chief. I don't possess anything at the moment, except this. Accept it with my thanks."

He pushed the bottle of whisky along to Dodge, and got up.

"Thanks, I can use it," said Dodge. "Goodbye, and good luck."

"I hope you get your woman, too," said Burns.

When the runabout nosed into the village, Burns had his breath taken away by the astounding change that had taken place in only one day.

The village was its colourful self. The gay robes that swirled around were unchanged. The change was in the villagers. For some time he couldn't believe they were the same people. But they were.

They were erect and vital in motion. Their figures had filled out. They were still slim, but not fragile and bony. The mud-coloured pigment had retreated from their skin, the creases were smoothed out as though they had never been.

Each face reflected a different personality, an individual. The difference between sexes was pronounced.

They were a golden-brown, healthy-looking race, and the colours of their eyes matched the colours of their bright robes, and their hair was glassy, wavy, and alive.

Spring had come, at last. With it, the mating plumage.

Later, Burns learned that this plumage lasted for a quarter of the year. But a quarter of a Martian year was more than five months. It was worth waiting for, as Dodge had known only too well.

Burns drove slowly along, feeling like a filthy, repulsive hobo among these beautiful people.

Rowena was sitting on the verandah of her blue house. She gave a glad cry at the sight of Burns and came running gracefully to meet him. Her body was as lithe as Diana's. She seemed, like some 'teen-age schoolgirl, to have blossomed overnight into sexual ripeness.

Her shining raven hair streamed behind her. There was a flush in her cheeks. Her teeth gleamed between smiling red lips. She made Sarah look cheap and artificial.

Her eyes were royal blue, and the love that was denied expression before, because it was out of season, now filled them.

Burns had read no poetry in twenty years. But that same teacher who'd tried to make him see Verulanium had also tried to make him see Wordsworth's vision. A couple of lines had stuck.

The Rainbow comes and goes,
And lovely is the Rose.

Burns reflected that the rose comes and goes also. A rosebush blossoms for only a quarter of the year. For most of the rest of its life it's a spiky, ugly growth, drab and brownish. But the mind's eye prefers to picture a rosebush in full bloom.

Clearly, this strange solar system, which encompassed the grasshopper and the elephant, the chameleon and the living

Martian sand-stars, had a place too for a people who changed through the seasons like the plants of Earth.

And all at once it seemed very natural to Burns. He accepted Rowena and her world as one accepted a rose-garden. It was all part of nature.

He had the feeling of coming home, at last. He caught Rowena in his arms.

Late that night they were still talking. He said : " When I was ill, Rowena, you told me many traditional Martian stories. Now I'm going to tell you one from my planet. It's an old, much-loved story, ' The Story of the Ugly Duckling.' "

" What was the name of this Ugly Duckling, dearest ?"

" John Howard Burns," he said, without hesitation.

William F. Temple

THE LITERARY LINE-UP

Next month's issue, which incidentally heralds our 13th year of publication, bids fair to being the best one of the year—individual preferences accepted. Two really outstanding novelettes head the list—" Trouble With Emily " a ' Sector General ' story by James White : the patient, a husky dinosaur; the doctor " something resembling a withered prune," both possessing certain psi faculties—and " Life Plan " by newcomer Colin Kapp, a really fine ' first ' with a new idea approach to *homo superior*.

That isn't all—every short story is a winner, too. Just look at the batting order—Brian Aldiss, Robert Presslie, John Kippax, Arthur Sellings, and Clive Jackson. From here it looks definitely a better-than-average issue—and 1958 has already been a top year !

Story ratings for No. 72 were :

1. The Star Game - - - - - Dan Morgan
2. Idiot's Delight - - - - - John Wyndham
3. One For The Road - - - - Robert Presslie
4. Absolutely Inflexible - - - - Robert Silverberg
   Ringside Seat - - - - - John Brody
5. The Wayward Ship - - - - Sydney J. Bounds

In the May 1957 issue, Richard Wilson had the memorable "Q.R.M."—a story of interplanetary communications. Now he comes up with another outstanding story idea—attempting to understand the meaning behind an alien race's language when most of it is spoken in rhyming couplets!

DENY THE SLAKE

By RICHARD WILSON

The skipper looked at what Ernest Hotaling had scribbled on the slip of paper.

The colour of my true love's cheek
Will turn to grey within a week.

The skipper read it and exploded. "What kind of nonsense is this?"

"Of course it wouldn't rhyme in a literal translation," Ernest said mildly. "But that's the sense of it."

"Doggerel!" the skipper exclaimed. "Is this the message of the ages? Is this the secret of the lost civilization?"

"There are others, too," Ernest said. He was the psychologist-linguist of the crew. "You've got to expect them to be obscure at first. They didn't purposely leave any message for us."

Ernest sorted through his scraps of paper and picked one out:

They warn me once, they warn me twice.
Alas! my heedn't turns me spice.

"There seems to be something there," Ernest said.

The skipper snorted.

" No, really," Ernest insisted. " An air of pessimism—even doom—runs all through his stuff. Take this one, for instance :

" *Music sings within my brain :*
I think I may go mad again."

" Now that begins to make some sense," said Rosco, the communications chief. " It ties in with what Doc Braddon found."

The skipper looked searchingly at his technicians, as if he suspected a joke. But they were serious.

" All right," the skipper said. " It baffles me, but I'm just a simple spacefaring man. *You're* the experts. I'm going to my cabin and communicate with the liquor chest. When you think you've got something I can understand, let me know. ' I think I may go mad again.' Huh ! I think I may get drunk, myself."

What the technicians of the research ship *Pringle* were trying to learn was why the people of planetoid S743 had turned to dust.

They had thought at first they were coming to a living, if tiny, world. There had been lights on the nightside and movement along what seemed to be roads.

But when they landed and explored, they found only powder in the places where there should have been people. There were heaps of fine-grained grey powder in the streets, in the driving compartments of the small cars — themselves perfectly preserved—and scattered all through the larger vehicles that looked like buses.

There was powder in the homes. In one home they found a heap of the grey stuff in front of a cookstove which was still warm, and another heap on a chair and on the floor under the chair. It was as if a woman and the man for whom she'd been preparing a meal had gone *poof*, in an instant.

The crew member who'd been on watch and reported the lights said later they could have been atmospherics. The skipper himself had seen the movement along the roads ; he maintained a dignified silence.

It had been a highly developed little world and the buildings were incredibly old. The weather had beaten at them, rounding their edges and softening their colours, but they were as sturdy as if they'd been built last week.

All the cities on the little world were similar. And all were dead. The *Pringle* flew over a dozen of them, then returned to

the big one near the plain where the ship had come down originally.

The tallest building in each city was ornate out of all proportion to the rest. The researchers reasoned that this was the palace, or seat of government. Each of these buildings had a network of metal tubing at its peak. Where there were great distances between cities, tall towers rose from the plains or sat on tops of mountains, each with a similar metal network at the apex.

The communications chief guessed that they were radio-video towers but he was proved wrong. There were no radio or television sets anywhere, or anything resembling them.

Still, it was obvious that they were a kind of communications device.

Doc Braddon got part of the answer from some of the grey dust he'd performed an " autopsy " on.

The dust had been found in a neat mound at the bottom of a large metal container on the second-story of a medium-sized dwelling. Doc theorized that one of the people had been taking some sort of waterless bath in the container when the dust death came. The remains were thus complete, not scattered or intermingled as most of the others were.

Doc sorted the particles as best he could and found two types, one definitely inorganic. He conferred with Rosco on the inorganic residue. Rosco thought this might be the remains of a tiny pararadio transceiver. Possibly each of the people had carried one around with him, or built into him.

" We're only guessing that they were people," Doc said cautiously, " though it would seem safe to assume it, since we've found dust everywhere people could be expected to be. What we need is a whole corpse."

While patrols were out looking for bodies Rosco tested his theory by sending a radio signal from one of the towers and watching a feeble reaction in the dust.

" If we can assume that they were people," Rosco said, " they apparently communicated over distances by personalized radio. Maybe through a mechanism built into the skull Would that mean there wouldn't be any written language, Ernest ?"

Ernest Hotaling shrugged. " Not necessarily. I should think they'd have kept records of some kind. They could have been written, or taped—or chipped into stone, for that matter."

He asked the lieutenant to enlarge his search. "Bring me anything that looks like a book, or parchment, or microfilm, or tape. If it's chipped in stone," he added with a grin, "I'll come to it."

Meanwhile they ran off the film that had been grinding away automatically ever since the planetoid came within photoradar range of the ship. The film confirmed what the lookout reported—there had been lights on the nightside.

Furthermore, one of the sensitized strips at the side of the film showed that signals, which had been going out from the tower tops in a steady stream, increased furiously as the *Pringle* approached. Then, as the ship came closer, they stopped altogether. At the same instant the lights on the nightside of the planetoid went out. The film showed that the road movement the skipper had seen stopped then, too.

Ernest tried to analyze the signals reproduced on the film. He had small success. If they represented a language, it would take years before he could even guess what they meant. The only thing he was sure of was that the signals, just before they died, had become a thousand times more powerful.

"Maybe that's what killed them," Rosco said.

"Possibly," Ernest said. "It begins to look as if the people were deliberately killed, or committed suicide, all at once, when we hove into sight. But why?"

"You tell me," Rosco said. "That sounds like your department."

But Ernest could tell him nothing until after the lieutenant came back with a long slender cylinder enclosing a seemingly endless coil of fine wire. The lieutenant also brought a companion cylinder, apparently a means of playing back what was recorded on the coil.

Ernest experimented until he learned how to operate it, then shooed everybody out of his cabin and went to work.

Ernest Hotaling had joined the crew of the research ship *Pringle* on Ganymede as a replacement for Old Craddock, who'd decided on short notice that thirty years of spacefaring were enough. It would be another ten or twelve years before the *Pringle* returned to Earth and though Craddock was only seventy-eight his yearning to start a proper bee farm became overwhelming.

The others were not unhappy about his departure. The swarm he'd kept in his cabin was small but the bees were

gregarious and were as likely to be found in the recreation room as in their hive. So when Craddock and the paraphernalia he'd collected over the decades had debarked, the rest of the crew sighed in collective relief and the skipper went looking for a replacement.

Ernest Hotaling, fresh out of Ganymede U., was the only man qualified, on the record, for the job. He had the necessary languages and his doctorate was in psychology, though his specialty was child therapy.

The skipper puzzled through the copy of Ernest's master's thesis. The lad—he was twenty-three then—had devoted it to children's folklore. The skipper, admittedly a simple man, wasn't sure it contributed profitably to the world's knowledge to spend a year in the study and explanation of *Winnie the Pooh*, or *Step on a crack, Break your mother's back*, or *The Wizard of Oz*.

The skipper had gone to Space Prep at the age of fourteen and later to the Academy itself and there were obviously wide areas of childhood that had passed him by. He'd never heard of *Struwwelpeter*, for instance, or *Ibbety bibbety gibbety goat*, and he wondered if a grown man who immersed himself in this sort of thing was the one for the job.

What was worse was that Hotaling, according to the University yearbook, was a poet.

But when the skipper interviewed Hotaling and found him to be a lean, muscular young man who'd obviously had a haircut in the past week and who laughed genuinely at one of the skipper's more purple stories, he signed him on immediately.

The skipper had one last thought. "You don't keep bees, do you?"

"Not even in my bonnet," Ernest said.

"Then we'll get along. Just keep your nursery rhymes to yourself."

"Aye, aye, sir," said Ernest.

"Look," Ernest told the skipper, "I've studied their literature, if that's what it is, until I'm saturated with it. Maybe it doesn't make sense to you but I've worked out a sort of pattern. It's an alien culture, sure, and there are gaps in it, but what there is fits together."

"All right," the skipper said. "I'm not questioning your findings. I just want to know why it has to be in that ridiculous rhyme."

" Because they were a poetic people, that's why. And it doesn't *have* to be in rhyme. I could give you the literal translation, but it was rhymed originally and when I make it rhyme in English too you get a more exact idea of the kind of people they were."

" I suppose so," the skipper said. " As long as we don't have to report to the Flagship in the sonnet form I guess I can put up with it. I just don't want to become the laughing stock of the fleet."

" It's no laughing matter," Ernest said. " It's pretty tragic, in any number of ways. In the first place, as Rosco suspected, they communicated by radio. But they had no privacy and couldn't hide anything from anybody. They were always listened in on by the big boys in the palace."

" How do you know ?"

" By the coil I worked from. It's a listening-storing device. These aren't official records I've transcribed ; they're the everyday expressions of everyday people. And everyone of them had been taken down and stored away, presumably so it could be used against the person who expressed it, if it ever became necessary.

" But they couldn't always get through to the person they wanted to reach, even though they got through to the coil. Here's a sad little lover's lament, for instance :

" *My plea to her is lost, as though*
The other three command the flow."

" Like a busy signal ?" asked the skipper.

" Very much like one," Ernest said, pleased by the skipper's comprehension. " On the other hand, they always got the messages from the palace. These took priority over all other traffic and were apt to come at any time of the day or night. The people were just one big captive audience."

" What about the dust? That seems to be a recurring theme in those jingles of yours."

" It is." Ernest quoted :

" *Dust is he and dust his brother ;*
They all follow one another."

" They're all dust now," the skipper said. " Did they have a revolution, finally, that killed everybody off ?"

" Both sides—the rulers and the ruled, simultaneously ? Maybe so." Ernest sorted through his pieces of paper. " There's this one, with its inference of the death of royalty along with that of the common man :

" *Comes the King ! O hear him rustle ;*
Falter, step, and wither, muscle."

The skipper was beginning to be exasperated again.

" I'll be in my cabin," he said. " You seem to accomplish more when I keep out of your way. But if you want to join me in a little whiskey to keep the falters and withers at bay, come along."

The Lieutenant knocked at Ernest's door in the middle of the night. " Mister Hotaling !" he called urgently.

Ernest fumbled into a pair of pants and opened the door.

" One of the men found this thing," the lieutenant said. " We were going to keep it locked up till morning but it's driving me crazy. Figured you'd better have a look at it."

The thing was a blue-green puppet of a creature wearing—or made of—a kind of metallic sailcloth. It was about three feet tall, a caricature of a human being. It hung limp by one arm from the lieutenant's grasp, its head lolling on its shoulder.

" What is it ?" Ernest asked sleepily, " a doll ?"

" No ; it's just playing dead now. It was doing a clog step in the cage before." He gave the thing a shake. " The worst of it is, it hummed all the time. And the humming seems to mean something."

" Bring it in here," Ernest said. He was fully awake now. " Put it in the armchair and stick around in case I can't handle it."

The creature sat awkwardly where it was put. But then the eyes, which a moment ago had seemed to be painted on the face, shifted and looked squarely at Ernest. It hummed at him.

" I see what you mean," he told the lieutenant. " It seems to be trying to communicate. It's the same language as on the coils." He stared at it. " I wish it didn't remind me of Raggedy Andy. Where did you find it ?"

" In the throneroom of the palace. One of the men on guard there grabbed it as it came out of a panel in the wall. He grabbed it and it went limp, like a doll."

" Listen," said Ernest.

" *Don't you cry, boys ; don't you quiver,*
Though all the sand is in your liver."

" What's that ?" the lieutenant said. " Do you feel all right, Mister Hotaling ?"

" Sure. That's what he said. Raggedy Andy here. I translated it—with a little poetic license."

" What does it mean ?"

" I don't think it's a direct message to us. More likely it's something filed away inside his brain, or electronic storage chamber or whatever he's got. The verse is in the pattern of the ones I translated the other day. The question now is whether Andy has any original thoughts in his head or whether he's just a walking record library."

" How can you tell ?"

" By continuing to listen to him, I suppose. A parrot might fool you into thinking it had intelligence of its own, if you didn't know anything about parrots, but after a while you'd realize it was just a mimic. Right, Andy ?"

The puppet-like creature hummed again and Ernest listened, gesturing the lieutenant to be quiet.

Finally Ernest said :

" *Down the valley, down the glen*
Come the Mercials, ten by ten."

" That makes as much sense as the one about the liver," the lieutenant said.

" Takes it a bit further, I think. No, seriously. ' Mercials ' is a set of syllables I made up, as short for ' commercials '—or the sand in their craw, the thumb in their soup—all the things they had to put up with as the most captive of all audiences."

" That wasn't an original thought, then ?"

" Probably not. Andy may be trying me out with a few simple couplets before he throws a really hard one. I wonder if he knows he's got through to me." He laughed as the lieutenant looked at him oddly. " I don't mean *he*, personally. I know as well as you do he's some kind of robot."

" I see. You mean, is somebody controlling him now, or is he just reacting to a stimulus the way he was built to do ?"

" Exactly." Ernest frowned at the doll-like creature. " I suppose the scientific way would be to dissect him—it. Take it apart, I mean. I've got to stop thinking of it as a him. We'd better get Doc Braddon in on this."

He punched the 'com button to Doc's cabin. The sleepy voice that answered became alert as Ernest explained. Doc arrived minutes later with an instrument kit, looking eager.

" So this is your new toy," he said. The creature, which had been slumped listlessly in the chair, seemed to look at Doc

with distaste. It hummed something. Doc looked inquiringly at Ernest. " Have you two established communication ?"

" It's a robot," Ernest said defensively. " The question is, could we learn more by leaving it intact and pumping it for whatever information is stored up inside it, or by taking it apart ? For instance, it just said :

" *Uninterred beyond the hills*
Lie never weres and never wills."

Doc became excited. " It really said that ?"

" Well, not in so many words. It said—"

" I know, I know. Your poetic license hasn't expired. I mean that *is* the gist of it ? That somewhere back of the hills there's a charnel heap—a dump of corpses, or miscarriages—something of the sort ?"

" You could put that interpretation on it," Ernest said. " I got the impression of something abortive."

" That's the best lead yet," Doc said. " If we could find anything other than dust piles, no matter how embryonic—Lieutenant, your boys must have been looking in the wrong places. How soon can you get a detail out over the hills ?"

The lieutenant looked at his watch. " If I've got this screwy rotation figured out, dawn's about half an hour off. That soon enough ?"

" It'll have to do."

" What about Raggedy Andy here ?" Ernest asked. " Do we keep him intact ?"

" Don't touch a hair of his precious head," Doc said. " He's earned a stay of dissection."

The creature, still quiet in the chair, it eyes vacant now, hummed almost inaudibly. Ernest bent to listen.

" Well ?" Doc said.

" Strictly a non-sequitur," Ernest told him :

" *Here we go, lass, through the heather ;*
Naught to daunt us save the tether."

" It makes me sad," Doc said. He yawned. " Maybe it's just the hour."

Cook had accomplished his usual legerdemain with the space rations but the breakfast table was less appreciative than usual.

" The detail's been gone a long time," Doc Braddon said, toying with an omelette. " Do you think it's a wild goose chase ?"

" Reminds me of a time off Venus," the skipper said. " Before any of you were born, probably . . ."

His juniors listened politely until the familiar narrative was interrupted by the 'com on the bulkhead. They recognized the voice of Sergeant Maraffi, the non-com in charge of the crew in the scout craft.

" We found something. Looks like bodies. Well preserved but incomplete. Humanoid."

" Bring 'em back," the skipper said. " As many as you've got room for in the sling." He added as an afterthought : " Do they smell ?"

" Who knows ?" Maraffi said. " I sure don't aim to take off my helmet to find out. They're not decomposed, though."

The skipper grumbled to Doc : " I thought you checked the atmosphere."

" There isn't any," Doc said, annoyed. " Didn't you read my report ?"

" All right," the skipper said, not looking at him. " I can't do everything. I naturally assumed these people breathed."

" If they did, it wasn't air," Doc said.

" Bring back all you can, Maraffi," the skipper said. " But leave them outside the ship. Everybody on the detail takes double decontamination. And we'll put you down for hazard pay."

" Aye, aye, sir. We're on our way."

" They're androids," Doc said. He'd gone out in a protective suit to the grisly pile. " These must be the false starts."

The other technicians watched him on a closed-circuit hookup from inside the ship.

" Are they like us ?" Ernest asked. " They look it from here —what there is of them."

" Damn near," Doc said. " Smaller and darker, though. Rosco, you were right about the communication. There's a tiny transceiver built into their skulls. Those that have heads, that is."

" If that's the case," Rosco said, " then why weren't these— stillbirths, whatever you want to call them—turned to dust like the others ?"

" Because they'd never been activated," Doc said. " You can't blow a fuse if it isn't screwed in. Skipper, I've seen about all my stomach can stand for now. I suppose I'm a hell of a

queasy sawbones, but these—things—are too much like human beings for me to take much more of them at the moment."

"Come on back," the skipper said. "I don't feel too sturdy myself."

Ernest Hotaling was writing verse in his cabin when the lieutenant intercommed him. He had just written, in free translation :

A girl is scarcely long for the road
If passion'd arms make her corrode.

Ernest wasn't entirely satisfied with the rhyme, though he felt he'd captured the sense of it. The lieutenant's call interrupted his polishing. He touched the 'com and said : "Hotaling."

"Patrol's back, Mister Hotaling. You'll want to see what they found."

"Another heap of false starts ? No, thanks."

"Not this time. They found some people. Two live people."

"Alive ! Be right there."

He raced down, then fretted as he waited for Doc to fumigate the people as they came through the airlock. Ernest saw them dimly through the thick glass. They were quite human-looking. But how had they survived whatever had turned thousands of their fellows to dust ? Or were these—a man and a woman, elderly and fragile-looking—the rulers who had dusted the others ?

"How much longer, Doc ?" he asked.

Doc grinned. "In about two quatrains and a jingle, Ernest."

They brought the couple to the main lounge and set them down at a long table. The skipper took a seat at the far end. Apparently he planned to listen but not take part in the questioning. That would be up to Ernest Hotaling, if he could establish communication.

He'd mastered the language to the extent that he'd been able to transcribe the record-coils and understand the robot, but whether he could speak it intelligibly enough so that these living—he almost thought "breathing"—people would understand him was a question.

Doc Braddon took a seat next to the couple. Rosco was on the other side of them and Ernest opposite them, across the table.

Up close, it was obvious that they were androids. But they had been remarkably made. They had none of the jerkiness of movement or blankness of expression that had characterized Earth's attempts along the same lines.

Ernest explained his doubts about his ability to make himself understood and asked his shipmates to be patient with him. He smiled at the couple and said to them in English : " Welcome to our ship." Then he repeated it in their humming language.

They returned his smile and the old woman said something to the man. Rosco looked inquiringly at Ernest, who shook his head.

Ernest made a face. " I forgot to put it in verse. I'll try again."

This time the response was immediate. Both man and woman spoke at once. Then the woman smiled and nodded to the man to talk for both of them.

It was just a curious sing-song humming for the rest of them, but Ernest listened with rapt attention and apparent comprehension, though not without strain.

Finally the man stopped.

" What did he say ?" Rosco demanded.

" Let me get the rest of it first," Ernest said. He spoke to the man briefly. His expression became grave as he listened to the reply.

" Well, come *on* !" Doc said impatiently. " Give us a translation."

" All right," Ernest said. He looked troubled. " These two are the only ones left of their race. The rest are dead—deactivated. The others—the other race—left the planetoid some time ago."

Ernest spoke again to the man. Listening to his reply, he found it difficult to think of him as non-human. There was a sadness, a fatalism, in his eyes, yet a dignity that came only with humanity. Only a hairline separated these two from mankind.

The impatience of the others made Ernest interrupt, so he could give them a resume.

" As I said, they're the last. They survived only because they'd made a pilgrimage to a kind of underground shrine. The signals that killed the others didn't reach them through the layers of rock. Apparently the shrine had something to do with a planned revolt against the electronic law that governed them.

" It was an insidious law," Ernest went on, " with built-in enforcement. Any infraction could be punished instantly from central control in the palace. The infraction would trigger a shock wave, tuned to the individual frequency of the offender. The intensity of the wave was geared to the seriousness of the offense. Treason meant death from the strongest wave of all —the one that turned them to dust."

" Absolute rule," Doc said. " Pretty hopeless."

" Yes, in one way. But paradoxically they had an infinite amount of freedom of speech. You see that in their verses. No one was punished for what he said—only for what he did. I suppose it had to be that way, otherwise there'd have been wholesale slaughter."

" Which there was, at the end," Doc pointed out. " Who do you think exercised the control that killed all the others ?"

" We did," Ernest said. " We killed them."

" We killed them ?" Doc said. " You're crazy !"

" You'd better explain yourself, Hotaling," the skipper said. " Stop talking in riddles."

" Aye, aye, sir. When I say we killed them, I don't mean directly or deliberately. And of course I don't mean killed, since they were all androids. But we de-activated them by triggering some mechanism when our ship came to the planetoid their masters had left."

" Hold on," the skipper said. " Now you're going too fast. Since they were androids, and were created, the important thing is to find out where these creators went—and whether it was last month or ten thousand years ago."

Ernest spoke to the couple.

" It was a long time before we came," he translated. " They don't know how long—their feeling of time is vague. They kept no records of their own and because there were no children they have no conception of generations. They were created adults, in various stages of maturity. As for who the others were—they were the Masters, with a capital M ; gods, almost in their view, with absolute power over them."

" Where did they go ?" the skipper asked. " And why ? Let's try to get more facts and less philosophy."

" They went looking for a better world, where conditions for life would be more favourable. Whether that means for the Masters or for their creations isn't clear. Nobody consulted them. They'd been given experimental life, only it was more a loan than a gift, to be foreclosed if they displeased the Masters or in any way threatened their experiment.

" The Masters were like themselves in appearance. Whether they were air breathers isn't clear because these two have no conception of what breathing is. The Masters did wear elaborate costumes but whether these were breathing suits or merely the trappings of their superiority is a question.

" I asked if the Masters were trying to create a new set of bodies for themselves, possibly because their own were breaking down or were diseased. The answer to that, like the answer to so many other questions, is that they simply don't know."

There was a commotion at the doorway. The soldier on guard there made a futile grab at something. The something was the puppet-like creature Ernest had named Andy, which evaded him and ran into the room. It jumped lightly to the table, faced the old couple and pointed both its arms at them.

Their expressions, as they regarded the puppet, were of sorrowful resignation. The man clasped the woman's hand.

The puppet spoke, in a brief piercing hum. There was an instant of quiet, then the dullest of popping sounds. The couple, who one second had seemed as alive as any of the Earthmen, the next second were little mounds of grey powder on the chairs and under the chairs.

The lieutenant burst in, followed by the sergeant. "The Andy doll got out of the cage !" he cried. " Did it come in here ?"

" Did it come in here ?" the skipper mimicked. " Get out, lieutenant, and take your comic-opera soldiers with you." To the technicians at the table he yelled : " Grab that obscene thing !"

The doll, grabbed from several directions, was torn apart, spilling out a reddish-brown spongelike substance.

Something else came out, too : a perforated disk the size of a fist. Rosco retrieved it as it rolled along the table, then quickly dropped it in an ash tray.

" The damn thing's hot," he said.

Doc Braddon, still looking stunned, asked Ernest : " What did the doll say to them before it destroyed them ?"

" It was a sort of law-enforcing robot. They told me about it. A kind of custodian the Masters left behind to keep things in line." Ernest stared dully at the empty chairs.

" It said :

" *You hid, and I*
Now bid you die !"

Rosco toyed with the ash tray in which he'd put the disk " There's a clue to the Masters right in this gadget," he said. " Maybe it's simply a servo-mechanism that was set once and has been functioning automatically ever since. But on the other hand it may still be linked directly to the Masters."

" Good point," the skipper said. " Give it a run-through for what it's worth. If it does give us a line on where they got to, I'll ask the Flagship for permission to track them down."

Doc Braddon said to Ernest : " You said the Masters were godlike. You're not implying anything supernatural ?"

" No. That was the androids' view, not mine. As a race of almost-people created in a laboratory they naturally held their creators in a certain awe. They hoped for liberation, and even tried to do something about it ; but they knew it was futile. The Masters built them so they'd turn to dust if they misbehaved and when they left they fixed it so the vibrations of any spaceship other than their own would do the same thing —presumably so their creations wouldn't fall into other hands. The sad thing is that the almost-people knew it. One of their verses went :

" *If comes the ship to make us free,*
It killeth you, it killeth me."

" Do you mean we could have saved them if we'd come in with engines silent ?" the skipper asked.

" I don't know," Ernest said. " They certainly didn't think much of their potential. There's a fatalism, a sense of thwarted destiny running all through their literature. Their hope died on the vine, so to speak. If you can stand one more of their verses, this one might sum up their philosophy :

" *This they give to us they make :*
They give us thirst, deny the slake."

The skipper was silent for a time, staring down at the little mounds of grey dust.

Then he said to his technicians :

" You've done a good job, all of you. We'll send a co-ordinated report to the Flagship tomorrow and stand by for orders. In the meantime, if there's anyone here with an honest physical thirst, I'd be glad to have him join me in slaking it in my cabin. No offense implied, Ernest."

" None taken, sir."

Richard Wilson

EQUATOR

International politics will seem very unexciting in comparison to interplanetary politics—especially if Man and Alien attempt to live together in peace. If it happens to be on Earth, as in this outstanding story, the complications are going to be infinitely greater, and more dangerous.

By BRIAN W. ALDISS

Conclusion

FOREWORD

The Rosks, a humanoid race from Alpha Centauri II, arrived in the solar system in March 2189. *They claim that their ship was the first interstellar vessel ever ; coming as colonists, they expected to find Earth habitable but not inhabited. They cannot face the two-generations-long journey back to Alpha II. Consequently, after much litigation, Earth grants them sanctuary, in the form of* 80 *square miles of Sumatra, on the equator. Later they are given in addition a small chunk of Luna, Area* 101.

Unfortunately, the situation between men and Rosks deteriorates. The Rosks have an aggressive dictator, Ap II Dowl, and possibly possess super weapons. Each side spies on the other. Tyne Leslie, *ex-diplomatic corps man turned spacer, goes spying on Area* 101 *with friends* Murray Mumford *and* Allan Cunliffe. *He is knocked out in a surprise Rosk attack, comes round to find Allan has disappeared ; Murray explains that Allan lost his nerve, had to be shot. Then Murray himself disappears into Padang, proliferating capital of Sumatra.*

Tyne takes up the hunt, hating Murray, determined to get the truth of the 101 *affair from him. A United Nations Council agent,* Stobart, *warns Tyne off. When Tyne is almost immediately caught by Rosks, he is only saved from death by a renegade Roskian girl,* Benda Ittai. *She, like Stobart, warns Tyne off, saying the whole situation is too big for him. She says that Murray is carrying microfilm, given to him by Rosks in Area* 101, *which is to be passed on to the Roskian contact in Sumatra ; and that this film contains plans of an imminent Roskian invasion fleet now setting out from Alpha II for Earth. The first vessel was really a reconnaissance party.*

Benda maroons Tyne on an island, but later he escapes, gets back to the mainland and heads for the big plankton plant at Semapang, where something that Murray said to his girl Mina *suggests he may be hiding. Climbing down the seaward facade of this great building, Tyne sees in the darkness that he is being followed. He slips, plunging down into the sea. At this moment, the submarine gates of the plant open to ingest sea water, from which they will extract the plankton to make synthetic food. Tyne is sucked under water, into the great maw of the plant itself.*

V

The swamping pounding liquid registered on his tousled sense as sound : sound roaring him to death.

In the blundering blackness before Tyne's eyes, pictures squirmed like worms, sharing his agony. They were images of his past life bubbling up, scum-like, to the surface of his drowning brain. Incidents from his personal history returned to him, enfolding him as if to protect him from present pain. Then they were gone.

The bubble of the past had burst. His head was above water again. Exhaustedly, gulping down air, Tyne paddled to keep afloat in the racing water. Faint, reflected lights rode on the flood round him. He was somewhere inside the huge, automated plant, which was dimly lit by multi-coloured guide-lights here and there. The factory was cybernetically controlled, tenanted by robot devices. No one would save him if he could not save himself.

In his relief at finding his head above water, Tyne did not for a minute realise the grimness of his new predicament. He was simply content to float at the top of a rising tide of water, breathing and snorting painfully. Beyond thick glass, he could

see the interior of the plant, where a shadowy file of processing tanks, moving by jerks, slowly revolved vats of jelly ; endless pipes and presses marched into the background. He could see too, negligently, successive floors of the edifice sink from his gaze as the water lifted him up and up.

His mind snapped back into something like its normal degree of awareness. Searchingly, Tyne looked about. He had come up through the bottom of, and was now imprisoned in, a great glass tube with a diameter of some fifteen feet, standing a full six storeys high.

Peering through the glass in sudden agitation, Tyne saw other giant tubes ranged alongside his, like the pipes of some overblown organ. The tubes stretched from base to roof of the plant, through all floors, and were filling rapidly with the incoming sea water.

Tyne looked up. The ceiling was growing closer. The tube was filling right up to the top.

This was inevitable. He knew immediately where he was. These entry tubes took each intake of water. When they were filled, great filter plungers came down from the top like slow pistons, filtering through the sea water, compressing plankton to the bottom of the tube : and not only plankton, but any other solid which happened to be there. Mercifully, Tyne Leslie would be dead by drowning before he was crushed against the bottom.

Between the turbulent water surface and the underside of the plunger, only some nine feet remained ; the distance was decreasing rapidly.

Groaning, treading water, Tyne felt in his trouser pocket. The Rosk .88 was still there. Tearing it free, Tyne lifted it above the surface of the water.

Six feet left between him and the plunger.

He prayed that a man who had once told him that these weapons were unaffected by water had spoken the truth. Shaking it, he turned over onto his back, floated, aimed at the glass imprisoning him.

Five feet of air above him.

He squeezed the trigger. As always with this incredible weapon, there was no recoil. The big slug shattered the tube up, down and sideways, converting it in a flash into a multitude of glass shards, a foot thick and some of them a couple of stories long. Tyne was swept at this fearsome barrier by the weight of released water.

It carried him right out into the factory. For a moment, a great gulf extending down into the bowels of the plant hung below him. Then he snatched at and clung to a balcony railing. His arms creaked at their sockets but he clung there. As though for an age, Tyne hung on ; as though for an age, water and glass cascaded past him, a waterfall containing death. With a great effort, he climbed over the rail to safety, hardly realising himself alive.

Another sound roused him, a sound easy to identify: a siren was wailing ; directly he punctured the big tube, an automatic alarm had gone off.

To be caught in here would mean the end of everything. Forfeiting his freedom might mean losing the last chance of finding Murray, even the last chance of passing the vital information gained from Benda Ittai on to the proper authorities. Tyne got up, dripping, pushing the wet hair back from his eyes. He was on a catwalk ; a couple of feet away, crates of processed plankton, now disguised as steaks and pastes and spreads, moved briskly on a conveyor belt. And rapid footsteps sounded near at hand.

The dark was penetrated by widely spaced lights, some red, some orange, some blue. Peering through the gravy blackness in which swabs of light swam, Tyne saw a figure running round the catwalk towards him. Two figures ! Whoever had pursued him outside, had managed to follow him into here. Someone with keys to the place.

" Leslie ! Tyne Leslie !" a voice called.

It was magnified, distorted, made metallic, by the acoustics of the building ; Tyne did not think he would have recognised it, even in more favourable circumstances. With sudden fear, he felt convinced that the Rosks were after him. He jumped onto the conveyor belt.

He slipped, knocking a crate off the other side ; the belt was travelling considerably faster than he had estimated. In some alarm, Tyne knelt up, staring back to see where his pursuer was. At that moment, he himself was borne under an orange light. Cursing lest he had given himself away, Tyne turned to see where he was being carried.

A low entrance loomed just ahead.

Involuntarily, Tyne shouted with alarm. He ducked. At once, impenetrable darkness swallowed him. He was in a tunnel. His elbow hissed against a moving side wall, and he tucked it in hastily. He dared not raise his head. There was nothing to be done but crouch between crates.

The conveyor emerged suddenly into a packing bay. A robot loader under a bright light was pushing the crates from the belt into waiting trucks, whose doors slammed shut when they filled. That was not for Tyne. He rolled off the belt just before the robot got to him.

There was no time to choose how he was going to drop. He fell painfully flat on the floor, picking himself up slowly and wearily. His watch told him that it was nearly 3.30 a.m. He should be in bed and asleep. He ached all over.

Even as he got to his feet, the conveyor exit ejected his two pursuers. They, apparently, knew better than Tyne what to expect ; as they catapulted into the packing room, they jumped clear one after the other, landing nimbly on their feet. Before Tyne could make up his mind to move, they had collared him.

" Come on, Leslie ; let's get you out of here," one of them said, holding tightly onto his arm.

They were masked.

Tyne could see nothing of their faces beyond their forehead and their eyes, which looked at him over the top of knotted handkerchiefs.

" Who are you ?" he asked feebly. " Why the yashmak effect ?"

" Explanations later," one of the men said. " Let's concentrate on getting you out of this building before half Padang arrives to investigate that alarm."

The siren was still shrilling as the men led Tyne down a couple of floors, unlocked a door with a special key, and pushed him into the open. At an awkward jog trot, they hurried down a slope, their way intermittently lit by lightning. Although rain still fell, its force was hesistant now ; the storm had worn itself out. Water gurgled down into storm drains beside their path.

A door stood at the end of the passage. The burlier of the two men, evidently the one in authority, produced another key, unlocked the door and flung it open.

They emerged behind an almost deserted car park, not far from the point at which Tyne had first tackled the building. Trotting across the puddle-strewn ground, they ran to an ancient model of a Moeweg, a German atomicar. Burly flung himself into the driver's seat as the others bundled into the back. He jerked the dipstick and they were moving at once.

As they accelerated past the front of the plant, the first car to answer the alarm call arrived from the opposite direction. It had a searchlight mounted on the roof ; it was a police car. As the old Moeweg dashed by, a uniformed man leant out of the police car and bellowed to them to stop. Burly accelerated.

" Damn it, they'll have our number," he said over his shoulder, to the man beside Tyne. " We'll meet trouble as sure as eggs. I'm going to turn off before we hit traffic ; this is no time to play questions and answers with a bunch of local cops."

A fire engine dashed past them. A helicopter thundered overhead. Bright headlights through trees indicated a stream of traffic heading round a bend for the scene of the alarm. Burly wrenched the dip ; they slewed across the road and squealed into a narrow lane leading into jungle.

The lane had been intended for nothing bigger than a cow-cart. Foliage whipped and smacked against the windows as the car lunged forward.

' It's crazy !' Tyne thought, ' all absolutely crazy !' He had time to wonder about the respect he had held for men of action. He had seen them as people at the equator of life, in the hottest spots, going round the fastest ; he saw now it was true only in a limited sense. These people merely went in circles. One minute they were hunters, the next hunted. They made decisions rapidly, yet those decisions seemed based less on a rational understanding and interpretation of their opponent's motives than on a desire to keep hopping continually in an immense, indeterminate game.

A game ! That was the secret of it all ! These men of action could enter a contest involving life and death only because once they had plunged in, the stakes became unreal. This was chess, played with adrenalin instead of the intellect. They had got beyond the ordinary rules of conduct.

The terrible thing was, Tyne found, that although he now saw this clearly enough, he too was caught in the game—voluntarily. World events had become too grave to be treated seriously. One could escape from all their implications by sinking into this manic sub-world of action, where blood and bluff ruled. By the same token, he saw the pendulum which ruled the sub-world sliding back in his favour. These men had caught Tyne when he was unprepared ; now that he was in their hands, he could be relaxed but alert ; in a sense, he had no care ; they had the worries. When this pressure grew to a certain pitch, they would become in their turn unprepared—

and he would elude them. It was inevitable, just a rule in the crazy game. After that, of course, the big pendulum would swing the other way again . . .

" This is far enough," Burly said, when the Moeweg had rocked and staggered some hundreds of yards into the jungle. The man beside Tyne never uttered a word.

The car stopped, and with an effort Tyne brought his attention back to the present. His mind had been busily elaborating his theory—even giving it some such half-jocular title as Leslie's Principle of Reciprocal Action, or the Compensatory Theory of Irresponsible Activity (' Leslie's Effect ')—with the same attention it had once devoted to preliminary drafts of official memoranda.

Burly flicked off the headlights, so that only the dash light illumined them. Outside, the rain had stopped, though the foliage overhead still dripped meditatively onto the car roof. It was 4.15, a numb, light-headed time of night.

" All right," Tyne said, " now suppose you tell me who you are, what you're doing, and why you think you're doing it ?"

Removing the cloth which had covered the lower part of his face, Burly turned in his seat to look at Tyne.

" First of all," he said, in a gentle, educated voice, " We ought to apologise for virtually kidnapping you like this, Mr. Leslie. Time pressed, and we had no alternative. I ought perhaps to add—forgive me—that none of this would have been necessary if you had waited for us to explain when we caught you up on the facade of the plankton plant. Your dive into the sea was spectacular, but unnecessary."

" I didn't dive," Tyne said, wryly. " I slipped."

Abruptly, Burly burst into laughter. Tyne found himself joining in. The tension eased considerably. The masked man beside Tyne never moved.

" This is the situation," Burly said. " My name, by the way, is Dickens—Charles Dickens. No relation, of course. I am working with the man you know as Stobart, the U.N.C. agent ; his second-in-command, as it were. You have been missing now for some hours, and we frankly were worried. You see, your role in this affair is an ambiguous one ; we naturally like to know where you are."

" Naturally. What made you look for me at the plankton plant ?" Tyne inquired. " Or shouldn't I ask ?"

" We weren't looking for you," Dickens said. " We just happened to be searching the place at the time you came along. Like you, we were hoping to find Murray Mumford there."

" How did you know I was still looking for Murray ?"

" You called his name, remember ? For another thing, Mina, Murray's woman, told you to go there. *She* told you Murray had said he would be at the plankton plant."

Tyne suddenly fell silent. Dicken's words brought back a vital memory to him, something that he had recalled during those terrible moments of drowning in the plant. The memory gave him the key to Murray's whereabouts ; he must get away from Dickens and his silent partner as soon as he had as much information as possible from them. Dragging his mind back to the present, he asked, " How did you find out about Mina, Dickens ?"

" Stobart found out. He questioned her after you'd left him. We've not been sitting down doing nothing."

" Don't talk to me about Stobart. There's a man who should learn a few manners before he mixes with people."

" Stobart is something of a psychologist," Dickens said. " He deliberately made his advice to you to stop looking for Murray so unpalatable that you would ignore it."

Tyne smiled to himself. These boys thought they had all the answers. What they did not know was that he had, in fact, already stopped looking for Murray when the Rosk picked him up in the taxi. Stobart could stuff that up his psychology.

" So Stobart wanted me as a stooge," he said. " Why ?"

" You were just one of his impromptu ideas. The Rosks had him cornered in the Roxy when you arrived. You were a diversion to draw them away. Actually, you were doubly useful. After the Rosks had taken you out to their ketch—"

" What !" Tyne exploded. Suddenly he was furiously angry. The silent man beside him placed a restraining hand on his arm, but Tyne knocked it off with his steel fist. " You mean you people know about that ketch ? Yet you let it stay there ? You let me be tortured—well, I was nearly tortured there. You let that thug of Ap II Dowl's, Budo Budda, come and go there as he pleased ? And all the time you *knew* about the ketch and could have blown it out of the water ? Isn't it infringing the interplanetary agreement merely by being there ?"

" Don't get excited. We didn't know you were taken to the ship ; the Rosks picked you up too quickly for that—you weren't half awake, Leslie ! We were waiting for big game ; Ap II Dowl is to visit that ketch in the early hours of this morning. By now, in fact, we should have trapped him there. If we can get him in the bag, many of Earth's troubles will be over."

" You don't know how many troubles she's got," Tyne said grimly. " She is about to be attacked by an Alpha II invasion fleet. That's the cheering news Murray carries round withhim."

" We know."

" You know ! How do you know ?"

" We have means, Mr. Leslie ; leave it at that."

As Dickens spoke, a buzzer sounded. A radio phone was installed on the Moeweg's dashboard, Dickens picked it up, listened, spoke into it in a low voice ; Tyne caught his own name being mentioned.

" Can't you ever think of a word to say ?" he asked the man sitting next to him. The other shrugged his shoulders and made no answer.

Suddenly Dickens thrust the phone down and swore luridly. He cursed with vigour and a vinegary wit, making it as obscene as possible. It was a startling display, coming from him.

" Leslie, you've properly buggered things up," he said, swinging round in the car seat. " That was Stobart calling. He says you were marooned on a small island called Achin Itu until about ten o'clock this evening—that is, yesterday evening. They found your monogrammed mescahale lighter on the beach. Is that a fact ?"

" I'd like that lighter back ; it cost me fifty chips. Tell Stobart, will you ?"

" Listen, Leslie, you shot up that Rosk Colonel, Budda. Do you know what you've done ? You scared Ap II Dowl away ! When he got wind of Budda's death, he stayed tight in the base. Our fellows raided the ketch an hour back, while you were playing tag over the plankton plant, and got nothing but a lot of useless information."

" Don't blame me, Dickens. Call it one of my impromptu ideas, eh ? Any time one of Stobart's plans go wrong, give me the word ; I find I get a thrill out of hearing about it."

" You're coming back to Padang with me, Leslie, right away. We're going to lock you up until you learn not to make a nuisance of yourself."

" Oh, no you don't !" Tyne said, half-getting out of his seat. Something hard pressed against his side. He looked down. The silent partner was digging in with a revolver, his eyes unwavering above the handkerchief. Dickens switched the car headlights on again as Tyne sat back helplessly in his seat.

" That's right, relax," Dickens said. " From now on, you're living at the government's expense."

" But I've got a hunch about finding Murray," Tyne said. " I swear to you, Dickens, I may be able to go straight to him. You still want him, don't you ?"

" We'd trade in the U.N.C. Building for him," Dickens said quietly, starting the engine. " But things are too complex for you feller. There's no room outside for amateurs just at present ; you've done enough damage. Here's another thing you didn't know. Have you paused to wonder why the Rosks couldn't slip a roll of microfilm smaller than your little finger from Luna to Earth themselves ? There's a reason why they got Murray to carry it. It's stolen from the Rosks."

" You mean the Rosks stole the film from the Rosks ? !"

" Yes ; that's what I said and what I mean. Ever heard of the Roskian peace faction, the RPF, led by Tawdell Co Barr ? They're a small and semi-illegal organisation of Rosks ranged against Ap II Dowl and pledged to work for peace with Earthmen. Their numbers are few. In Luna Area 101 there can't be more than a handful of them. But they managed to get their hands on this film, and of course they want it to reach the main body of RPF in the Sumatran base here. I fancy it'll be used for propaganda purposes, to show the Rosks what a bloodthirsty maniac Dowl is.

" I tell you this so that you can see why the situation is too complex for you ; it comes in layers, like an onion."

Even as he spoke, Dickens was wrestling with the car. The wheels spun in mud but did not move. While they waited here for the alarm on the main road to die down, the heavy vehicle had sunk into the soft track. Tyne scarcely noticed what was happening as he mulled over what Dickens had told him. It threw new light on at least one Rosk : the girl, Benda Ittai, who had saved his life.

" Have you ever heard of Benda Ittai ?" Tyne asked. Speaking her name aloud filled him with an unexpected pleasure.

" We're bogged down, damn it," Dickens said. " Oh, how I love Sumatra ! Benda Ittai is evidently one of the RPF.

Stobart's men found her on the ketch when they raided it. The Rosks were about to put her to death. Under the circumstances, our men found it best to let her go free ; I tell you, Stobart has a soft heart—I'd have locked her up. Damn this filthy, soggy country ! I can understand how they get volunteers for lunar duty. Yes, if I had my way, I'd clap her in prison ; I'd clap all of you—look, I'm getting out to put something under the wheels. Leslie, if you try to escape, my friend will shoot you in the leg. It's painful. Do by all means try it and see."

He climbed out, leaving his door swinging open. His feet squelched in the wet grass, and he steadied himself against the Moeweg's bonnet.

Tyne's heart thudded. He wondered if he stood a chance of overpowering the fellow beside him. Dickens was visible through the windscreen, bathed in bright light which only emphasised the sad, waiting, darkness of the forest on either side. The agent had produced a small sheath knife and was hacking at the thick fronds of a bush, throwing them under the car's front wheels.

Then something else was moving out there. It came swishing in from the treetops with a vibrant humming. Bushes and twigs writhed and cringed ; everything seemed to turn live at its approach.

Dickens straightened and saw it. Beautifully in control of himself, he dropped the foliage he had cut and reached for a holstered gun without a second's pause. As his hand came up, he fired two shots at the thing, then turned and leapt into the Moeweg, slamming the door shut behind him. Furiously, he made a fresh attempt to extricate the car from the mud. The flying thing charged at them, bowling in from the bending darkness.

" What is it ? What the devil is it ?" Tyne asked, severely rattled. He began to sweat. His ears jarred with the noise the thing made.

" It's a Rosk fly-spy," Dickens said, without turning his head. " Sort of flying eye. Televises reports of all it sees back to Rosk base. I've seen a captured one back at H.Q. They're unarmed but definitely not harmless. Mind it doesn't—ah !"

They jerked forward a foot, then fell back again, their wheels failing to grip. The fly-spy hovered, then dropped

almost to ground level. Tyne saw it clearly now. It was a fat disc, perhaps five feet in diameter and two feet six at its greatest width. Lenses of varying size studded its rim and undersurface. An inset searchlight swivelled a blinding beam of light at them.

Rotors, probably mounted on a gyroscope, powered the machine. They set up the humming note, making the bushes in their vicinity move uneasily, as if trying to escape observation. The rotors were set inside the disc, protected by fine mesh from possible damage.

It moved forward suddenly. Even as Dickens instinctively ducked, the fly-spy struck their windscreen, shattering it into tiny fragments. Dickens swore ripely.

" The Rosk base isn't far from here !" he shouted. " Just a few miles through the jungle. If this thing has identified us, it may be planning to wreck the car—to hold us up till a Rosk patrol can get at us. Cover your face up, Leslie—don't let it see who you are !"

The fly-spy had lifted. It hovered somewhere above the vehicle. They couldn't see it, but they could hear it, the venomous note of a hornet, amplified. All the leaves near the car waved furiously, enduring their own private storm. Tyne was tying a handkerchief round his face when Dickens flung the engine into reverse. Bucking wildly, the old Moeweg heaved itself out of the pit it had gouged for itself. At once the fly-spy returned to the attack. With a slicing movement, it sped down and struck one of the rear side windows. It did not retreat, just stayed there pushing, huge through the shattered glass, its lens seeming to sparkle with malice. The car lurched, the coachwork crumpled.

The silent agent scrambled up onto the seat, taking pot shots through the broken window. His forehead was grey and patchy above his mask.

" Aim at its rotors through the mesh !" Dickens bellowed. " That's the only way you'll knock it out !"

They were speeding recklessly backwards down the jungle track. Dickens drove looking over his shoulder, dipstick in one hand, gun in the other.

" That thing can squash you if you try to run for it," he said. " Squash you flat against the ground."

" I wasn't planning to jump out," Tyne replied. He had just been planning to jump out.

As he spoke, the silent man flung open his door, hanging out to get a better shot into the middle of the fly-spy's works. The thing reared up immediately into the branches overhead—and crashed down into one of the back wheels. The Moeweg skidded sideways into bushes and stopped, engine bellowing uselessly.

Tyne hardly paused to think. He knew they were trapped now. This thing could batter the car apart if it was so directed.

The dumb agent had been pitched onto the ground by the skid. Leaping through the open door, Tyne jumped onto him, snatched his gun and plunged into the undergrowth. He dived into the bushes recklessly, doubled up, doing anything to get away. Moving on hands and knees, he charged forward, heedless of any cuts or tears he sustained. Shots sounded behind him ; he did not know if Dickens was firing at him or the fly-spy.

He travelled fast. He tumbled into a little overgrown stream and was out in a flash. The faintest light, perhaps the first light of dawn, aided him.

He knew what to do. He was heading for a belt of thick trees with low branches. The fly-spy had severe limitations, for all its power. Dense foliage would stop it.

Tyne was on his feet now, running doubled up. He no longer knew which way he was running. That deep, determined humming sounded behind him. A light flickered and swam among the leaves, as the searchlight sought him out. The leaves writhed. Where were the damned trees ? !

Blowing hard, he pounded through chest-high vegetation. It seemed endless.

Now he bounded down a bushy slope, plunged into a line of trees, tore himself free of brambles. When he tripped a minute later, he could hardly get up. Looking wearily above his head, he saw against the dark sky a protecting network of branches. The smaller branches waved in an artificial wind.

Panting, Tyne lay there like a trapped animal.

All he could do, he had done. He hadn't imagined it would come after him ; he had thought it would stay by the car and the two U.N.C. agents. But . . . if its transmissions back to Rosk base had caused him to be identified there as the Earthman to whom Benda Ittai had spoken, then there was good reason for his being the quarry.

The leaves and grasses trembled about him. The resonant hum filled his ears. Jumping up like a frightened stag, Tyne flung himself into one of the trees. Pulling himself up, he hauled himself ten, fifteen feet above ground, hugging the trunk among a welter of stout, out-thrusting branches.

Seeing was better now. First light drifted like sludge through the trees. The slope he had run down lay in one direction, a fast river in the other. On the other side of the river lay what looked like a track.

The fly-spy had seen him. It swooped in low, cutting above the ground, its light probing. It could not rise to him because of the branches ; they shielded him as he had hoped. Instead, the machine nuzzled lightly against the tree bole. For the first time, looking down on it, Tyne saw its big fans, revolving in a whirl behind protective gratings. He fired at them with the agent's gun. His arm shook, the shot went wild.

The machine backed away and butted the tree. Then it circled out, seeking another way to get at him. Almost at the same time, Tyne became aware of Dickens, running down the slope. Following the fly-spy's noise, the agent had followed Tyne.

Branches cracked. The fly-spy was pushing through twigs and light branches on a level with Tyne. Tyne slid round the other side of the trunk. If he could only hold out till full daylight, this thing would be bound to go home or else risk detection. He squinted down below, but Dickens had disappeared.

Again he changed position, to keep the tree's girth between himself and the machine. This meant slipping down to a lower branch. He must beware of being forced all the way down ; on the ground he was defenceless. The thing droned angrily, like an immense spinning top, pushing persistently through a maze of twigs. It worked to one side ; again Tyne worked away from it.

Suddenly there was a shout, and the sound of shoes kicking steel.

Tyne looked round the tree, peering out like a scared squirrel.

Dickens had jumped or fallen onto the fly-spy ! The agent had climbed the next tree and then launched himself or dropped

outwards. Now he sprawled on top of the disc, fighting to get a grasp of it.

" Dickens !" Tyne yelled.

The agent slithered over the rocking surface of the fly-spy. His legs dangled, kicking wildly in air. Then he caught a finger hold in the machine's central mesh and drew himself into a more secure position. As the fly-spy rocked among the branches, he pulled his gun out, aiming it at the rotor blades.

All this had obviously taken the Rosks who controlled the big disc completely by surprise. It just drifted where it was, helplessly. Then it moved. Its pervasive note changing pitch, it shot up like an express lift.

Dickens was knocked flat by a bough. Partially stunned, he slithered once more over the side, and his gun went flying—clatter-clattering all the way from branch to branch down to the ground.

" Jump, Dickens, for God's sake !" Tyne shouted.

It was doubtful if the agent heard a word of it. He was carried up through the foliage, hanging on grimly, head half-buried in his arms. The last leaves swished by, and the fly-spy was out in the open, climbing slowly.

Heedlessly, Tyne jumped from the tree to sprawl full length in a flowering bush. Picking himself up, he broke from the trees, running along below the fly-spy, shouting incoherently. He dared not fire in case he hit Dickens.

In the vapid early morning light, the disc was clearly visible thirty feet up, heading fast on an unswerving course that would, Tyne guessed, take it back to Sumatran Base, where the Rosks awaited it. Dickens had evidently had the same thought. He knelt on top of the thing, wrenching at the screens on its upper surface. In a moment, he had unlatched a segment of screen, a wedgeshaped bit that left the rotors revolving nakedly underneath.

He wrenched his shoe off and flung it into the rotors.

At once the dynamic hum changed into a violent knocking. From the knocking grew the mirthless squeal of metal breaking up. With a few staccato grinding sounds, the fly-spy began to to fall, canting sharply.

Tyne was still running when it crashed into the river he had noticed earlier, bearing its passenger with it. They disappeared with a splash and did not come up again.

VI

It was 9.15 in the morning.

Tyne Leslie sat at the back of a Chinese coffee shop, eating durian off a cracked plate. His cheeks were smooth, his head was clear ; he had been to a nappi wallah who had shaved him and massaged his head and shoulders. When he had finally plodded into Padang, ninety minutes ago, after a fruitless search along the river bank for Dickens, he had felt half-dead. Now he was, after the shave, the massage and breakfast, alive again, alert, planning ahead, casting little feelers of worry into the future.

Already he had written a note to Under-Secretary Grierson, a second secretary to whose under-secretary Tyne had been, outlining the threat of invasion to Earth. That note had been delivered to the British Diplomatic Mission building, and would be before the Under-Secretary himself within an hour. How long it would be before any action was taken on it was another matter.

Meanwhile, time grew short. Murray had been at large in Padang for twenty-four hours. If the Roskian RPF agent had been unable to reach Murray, it would be because he had been dogged by his own people, the Rosks faithful to Ap II Dowl. Undoubtedly though, the parties interested in finding Murray were closing in : RPF, Dowl's men, the U.N.C., and possibly —undoubtedly, if they had wind of the affair—various nationally interested Earth groups. And Tyne.

And Tyne. He had told Dickens he was prepared to go straight to Murray. It was the truth. By a paradox, he could have done as much yesterday, before Stobart spoke to him.

The truth had lain, as so often happens, inside him, waiting for the ripe moment to reveal itself.

When Tyne questioned Mina in the Roxy foyer, she said that Murray had announced he was going to the plankton plant. She had assumed—and Tyne had unthinkingly accepted her assumption—that Murray meant the plant at Semapang, where he had nearly drowned himself. When Stobart had questioned the girl later, he had got the same answer ; that was why Tyne and Dickens had met at the building.

But Murray had meant something quite different when he spoke of the plankton plant.

In those terrible seconds when Tyne was dragged drowning through the submarine intakes at Semapang, scenes from his

past life had bubbled through his mind. One scene had been of Murray, Allan Cunliffe and himself breakfasting at the Merdeka Hotel after a heavy night. While he and Allan sat drinking coffee, Murray tucked in to a large breakfast, complaining all the time about the badness of the food. " It's always synthetic at the Merdeka," he said. " Doesn't matter what the food resembles, it's really plankton underneath. As the Americans say, it's a plant. A plankton plant ! I tell you dreary-looking couple of so-and-sos, we live in a plankton plant. Before you know it, the management will be offering us plankton women . . ."

The comments had stuck. From then on, the three of them had occasionally referred to the Merdeka as ' the plankton plant ' ; it had been a private joke between them, until they tired of it.

All this had run through Tyne's drowning mind. He knew now that to find Murray he had to go to the Merdeka again ; that was the place Murray had been referring to. Mina had been misled ; so had Stobart ; naturally enough, for they had never heard the old private joke. Tyne had been once, fruitlessly, to the Merdeka ; today, he was going to ask the right questions of the right people.

Settling his bill, he left the cafe. He had already purchased a spare clip of ammunition for the stolen gun in his pocket. Now he moved through side streets, warily, alert for danger. A protest march of the displaced, complete with drums and banners (" ROSKS LEAVE OUR WORLD TO PEACE," "WORLD POWERS ARE DUPES OF ALIENS," " SUMATRA HAS BEEN SACRIFICED !"), acted as convenient cover as Tyne slipped into the foyer of the hotel.

The familiarity, at once welcome and repugnant, of the place assailed him like a pervasive fog. At this hour, before Padang's political life, with its endless conferences and discussions, was under way, the lounge was full of the sort of men Tyne had been : restless, wretched (but smiling !) men who continually manoeuvred, but never manoeuvred boldly enough. Tyne skirted them, feeling as alien to them as a Rosk might have done.

He went through the building into the rear courtyard, where two very ancient Chinese ladies were combing each other's hair in the sunshine.

" Have you seen Amir, please ?" Tyne asked.

" He is at the warehouse, checking the rations."

The ' warehouse ' was a crude brick shed beyond the courtyard, tucked between other buildings and conveniently facing a small back lane. Outside it stood a little delivery van labelled, in Malayan, Chinese, Russian and English, ' Semapang Plankton Processed Foodstuffs.' The Merdeka was getting its daily quota of nourishment.

As Tyne approached, a uniformed driver emerged from the warehouse, climbed into the van and drove off. Tyne went stealthily to the warehouse door. Amir was there alone, left arm in a sling, leaning over a box checking delivery notes. Tyne entered, closing the door behind him.

Amir had been something of a friend of Allan's and Tyne's. Now there was only fear on his dark, intelligent face as he looked up and recognised his visitor.

" What have you done to your arm, Amir ?"

" I thought you were dead, Mr. Leslie !"

" Who told you that ?"

" You should not be here ! It is dangerous here, Mr. Leslie ! The Merdeka is always being watched. Please go away at once. For everyone's safety, go away !"

His agitation was painful to watch. Tyne took his good arm and said, " Listen, Amir, if you know there is danger, you must know something of what is happening. The lives of everyone on Earth are threatened. I have to find Murray Mumford at once. At once ! Do you know where he is ?"

To his surprise and embarrassment, the young Sumatran began to weep. He made no noise or fuss about it ; the tears rolled down his cheeks and fell onto the clean floor. He put up a hand to cover his eyes.

" So much trouble has been caused my country by other countries. Soon I shall join the Displaced. When our numbers are big enough, we shall force all foreigners to leave our land.'

" And the Rosks," Tyne added.

" *All* foreigners. Do you know there is a funeral to be held this evening, at the Bukit Besar ? Do you know whose funeral it is ? The half-Dutch girl, Mina."

" Mina ! She's dead ?" exclaimed Tyne.

" That is generally the reason for funerals," said Amir caustically. " The Rosks killed her because she was to do with your friend Mumford. Perhaps you will be interested to hear that the Rosks came for me yesterday ; they tortured me. Perhaps today they will come back to kill me. You came to

the Merdeka yesterday and I avoided you. Today I have not avoided you, and I shall probably die."

" Nonsense, Amir, take a grip of yourself ! The Rosks won't want you again," Tyne said. " What did they ask you yesterday ?"

Amir stopped crying as suddenly as he had begun. Looking Tyne straight in the eye, he pulled his bandaged arm from its sling and began to unwrap it. In a minute he produced it, exposing it with a penetrating mixture of horror and pride.

" The Rosks asked me where Murray Mumford is hiding," Amir said. " Because I did not tell them, this is what they did to me."

His left hand had been amputated at the wrist. Grafted on in its place, hanging limply, uselessly, was a chimpanzee's paw.

Tyne's own artificial left hand clenched convulsively in sympathetic pain.

" I'm sorry," he said. " I'm sorry, Amir."

" This is how they think of man."

He turned away, clumsily rebandaging his limb, and added in a choked voice, " But I did not tell them where Murray is. You I can tell. When he came here early yesterday morning, he said he was going to hide in the old Deli Jalat temple, down the lane. Now please go. Go and do not ever ask me anything again."

" I'm truly sorry," Tyne said, pausing by the door. " This'll be made up to you one day, Amir. Wait and see."

Amir did not turn round.

Outside, Tyne lept straight over a low stone wall and crouched there with his gun out. Amir had given him a bigger shaking than he cared to admit to himself. Slowly he raised his head and looked about.

One or two natives were busy about the few dwellings facing onto the little back street into which he had emerged ; none of them seemed to be interested in Murray. With a pang, he realised a bitter truth in what Amir had said. To the local population, the visiting nations which had descended upon Sumatra were as troublesome as the Rosks. Both groups were equally opposed to their way of life. The Rosks owed their ability to travel easily beyond their perimeter to a typically Eastern indifference to which of two forms of exploitation fell upon them. Had the powerful Western nations behaved

with more consideration to Sumatra over the past few centuries, they might be receiving more consideration from her now.

As Tyne was about to climb back over the wall, a man appeared from the direction of the Merdeka. He walked slowly as befitted his bulk, his eyes guardedly casting to left and right. It was Stobart.

He was walking away from the direction in which the Deli Jalat temple stood. When he saw the road was empty, he quickened his pace. As Tyne sank back into concealment, Stobart produced a whistle, raised it to his lips, blew it. No audible sound emerged ; it was ultrasonic—no doubt a summoning of forces.

Directly the U.N.C. agent had gone, Tyne hopped back over the low wall and headed in the direction of the temple, where Murray had told Amir he was going to hide. The settlement with Murray was coming ; in Tyne's pocket, the loaded gun felt reassuringly heavy.

Despite the hot sun on his shoulders, icy clarity seized him. He knew exactly what he was going to do. He was going to kill Murray.

Only one thing worried him, and he wasn't going to let that spoil his aim. Murray, waiting with his microfilm to meet the RPF agent, had covered his tracks well ; the glimpse of Stobart (who had no doubt picked up Tyne's trail in the Merdeka lounge) was a token he was still at large, despite the none too scrupulous powers ranged against him. Yet Tyne, working alone, was on the point of finding him. Why ?

Two pieces of information had led Tyne to Murray : Mina's information about the ' plankton plant ' ; and from there, Amir's about the temple. Both U.N.C. and, presumably, Rosk had got the same lead from Mina ; neither had got anything from Amir. Mina's information was capable of correct interpretation *only by Tyne ;* Amir had said his piece voluntarily *only to Tyne.* Why ?

One answer alone emerged. Murray had expected Tyne to pursue him. Before going into hiding, he had left those two messages with Mina and Amir deliberately, *knowing Tyne would follow them up.* Yet Murray would realise Tyne could have only one reason for following : to avenge Allan Cunliffe's death on the moon. And the motives a man might have for silently, deviously, beckoning his murderer towards him remained notably obscure. And seductively obscure.

Murray must be made to explain before the stolen gun and the bought bullets had their way with him. He must explain —and of course he must yield up the vital microfilm ; then he could die. Tyne experienced that touch of ice-cold clarity again. Once more he was right in the torrid zone of events. The equator of action whirled faster and faster about him ; yet he could not feel a thing.

" Come in, sir. I will make enquiry about your friend from the priests," the wizened dwarf at the teak gate said. He pattered away on bare feet, crabbed and eager. Fallen women and white tuans especially welcome.

The Deli Jalat temple stood decaying in several acres of ground which were littered with past attempts to start chicken farms and scrap heaps. The central building was a not ignoble imitation of a late Hindu temple, highly ornamented, but round it had collected, like smashed cars round a road obstruction, a number of later erections, most of them flimsy affairs of lath or corrugated iron. These had never been immaculate ; now they were merely tumbledown.

Unwilling to wait where he was bidden, Tyne moved over grass-encircled stones after the gate-keeper. In the air lingered an enchantingly sweet-sharp smell, a scent that seemed to carry with it its own unidentifiable emotion. There was a spice garden—grown out of hand, no doubt ! close at hand. Turning a corner, Tyne came on a ramshackle covered way. At the far end, a woman in a chinese dress, with clacking wooden soles on her feet, turned to look at him, then ran through a doorway. It looked like—yes, it had looked like Benda Ittai. Instinctively, Tyne increased his pace, sunlight jogging up and down on his shoulders.

He had a sudden choking image of taking her into the deserted spice garden, of making love to here there. It was not a picture he had intended. He turned his thoughts to Murray.

At the last door, the gatekeeper almost fell upon him with excitement, waving his arms anxiously.

" No sir, not here, sir ! Stop by the gate, sir. Previously I ask you to wait. The priests will not be prepared—"

" I've not come to see the priests," Tyne said. Pushing the man aside, he stepped in, into the shade inside the building. It was as if the sunlight had rattled up like a blind, showing the room behind it : a cool room, all wood, except for two big stone vases in the middle of the floor. Three men, priests, with

that vindictive, forward-leaning air that religion implants in the elderly, came forward at once.

" Please take me to Murray Mumford. I cannot wait," Tyne said.

" This is not a suitable hour," one of them said, ineffectually waving his hands.

" I'm sorry I cannot wait."

The three priests broke into a dialect, chattering rapidly to each other. They were frightened and angry. Fright won.

" Better to follow me," one of them said, beckoning querulously at Tyne.

He led the way up broad and creaking stairs, on which a smell of cats floated. They passed down corridors of wood and corridors of stone, finally stopping by an insignificant door below another staircase. The priest unbarred this door and opened it. A short ante-room was revealed beyond, with two doors leading from it.

" Try the right door," suggested the priest.

As Tyne stepped inside, the priest slammed the door behind him. Left suddenly in semi-darkness, he moved carefully over to the right hand door ; steadying himself, levelling the gun, he flung the door open.

It was a long, narrow room with a dirty window at one end. Occupying most of the space near the door was a wooden bed, now in use as a table and seat combined.

Benda Ittai,in A chinese dress, stood alone in the middle of the room, her mouth slightly open in a moue of surprise.

" Come in, Mr. Todpuddle," she said, using the name Tyne had assumed when interrogated on Budo Budda's ketch.

He nodded to her, as if in brief acknowledgement of her beauty.

His hackles up, Tyne took one step inside the room. Murray Mumford stood behind the door, his hands raised above his head. Round his waist he wore a Space Service belt ; a revolver protuded from its unbuttoned holster.

Tyne swung slowly on his heel, bringing his own revolver up to cover Murray's chest. He was aware of his face, stiff as leather, contorted into a killer's grin.

" Glad you finally made it, Tyne," Murray said, with a fair attempt at his old ease of manner. " Put your gun away and make yourself at home. Welcome to my humble—"

" Move over by the girl," Tyne said in a rasping whisper. " And I'll have your gun. Keep your hands raised. You're scum, Mumford—a betrayer, a traitor."

" If you hadn't got that toy in your hand, I'd break your neck for saying that," Murray said evenly, his cheeks colouring darkly.

" No, you wouldn't ! Are you suggesting you aren't carrying information for the Rosks—information absolutely vital to Earth ?"

Murray, keeping his hands raised, looked at Tyne straightly as he shuffled over towards Benda. His roughly handsome face looked tired and shadowy.

" If you want to discuss it, throw both the guns up on that high shelf," he said.

The shelf he referred to ran along one wall by the ceiling. Tyne never even glanced at it. He had the two of them together now, standing awkwardly by the foot of the bed.

" I don't want to discuss anything with you, Murray," he said.

" Go ahead and shoot me, then. But you probably realise as well as I do that one fool move like that and everything is lost."

" Give me that spool of microfilm, Murray."

" I've not got it !"

Tyne jerked his revolver convulsively. That he had not expected.

" Stop !" Benda Ittai made a nervous move forward. Though haggard, she still looked impressively cool and beautiful. " There is no time for quarrels, or we may be trapped here. Mr. Leslie, put both of the guns on the shelf and then we can explain to you. It is really necessary."

Tyne hesitated. He was in an awkward spot and he knew it. The vital matter was not his personal urge for revenge, but the need to get the film. The Rosk woman at least made it possible for him to back down without losing too much face. Roughly, he snatched Murray's revolver from its holster and threw it up on the shelf with his own.

" Better," Murray said, lowering his hands and fumbling for mescahales. Tyne noted with satisfaction how those hands trembled as they lit the tube. His own hands—even his steel one—were trembling in the same way.

Taking the initiative again, he said to Benda, " I assume from your presence here that you are the Rosk agent Murray was told to meet ?"

She said : " That is correct ; as you know, I was held up." She smiled slightly, with satisfaction at the understatement.

Murray said : " You guess right ; now stop guessing and listen to me. We may have very little time and we need your help."

" My help !" Tyne exploded. " I came here to kill you, Murray, by God, and now you tell me—"

Benda Ittai laid her hand on Tyne's arm. It felt soft and hot. 105.1, of course.

" Please give him a chance to explain !" she begged. " Don't talk so much : listen ! Just listen !"

" Yes, sound advice to an ex-politician !" Murray said. He was quickly getting control of himself. Tyne also, savagely, wildly, took control of himself, sat on the edge of the plank bed and took a mescahale from Murray.

" Make it good," he said. " Make it very good."

" The microfilm must be handed to Miss Ittai," Murray said, " and she must get it to Sumatra Base, to the RPF there. Remember Tawdell Co Barr, the first Rosk to speak to Earth ? He's the Peace Faction leader, secretly opposing Ap II Dowl. The RPF is weak ; here is the one last chance to strengthen them to the point where they might overthrow Dowl. If they could show this microfilm, this proof of Dowl's bloody-mindedness, to a majority of the Rosks, the population would rise and rebel against the dictator."

" Our people are as human as yours," Benda broke in. " Please see this terrible business as a moral struggle rather than a detective game. When their eyes are opened to what is going on behind their backs, all my people will surely rise against Dowl."

" You're trying to tell me they don't know they're merely the advance party of an invasion ?"

" Of course they don't. Can't you see," she said desperately, " we were all born on the ship, thinking ourselves colonists. There must have been sealed orders passed down from one generation of the officer class to the next."

" I see," Tyne said. He did see ; this is how political manoeuvres must be carried out anywhere in the galaxy. The leaders plotted, and the rest followed like sheep—unless they could be roused to see that only mutton-hood awaited them.

" You already have proof that I am no friend of Ap II Dowl and his ruffians," Benda said, speaking quietly, probably conscious of the effect she had upon Tyne. " Therefore trust

me. Let me take the microfilm to my people, the RPF. There it will be used to more effect than if World Government got it. Can you see that ?"

Yes, it was all clear enough, Tyne thought bitterly, knowing the other two searching his face for a clue in advance to what he was going to say. He did not know what he was going to say. The issue—get the microfilm or bust !—had disintegrated as he approached it. Now he was faced with as ticklish a problem as ever he had met across the highly polished tables of the U.N.C.

If he did nothing—say, if he were shot—Under-Secretary Grierson would start the machinery grinding. The small Rosk force on Earth would be crushed before reinforcements arrived. And when they did arrive ? Why, they would presumably be merciless ; nuclear bombardment from space did not bear thinking of.

If Stobart and his men arrived here, they of course would take the microfilm without delay ; they would find it wherever it was concealed. It would never go near a Rosk again. That move would also entail an immediate counter-attack against the perfidious alien within the gates.

If Ap II Dowl's men arrived here first—well, that was obviously the worst alternative of all.

At present, however, the initiative was not with Grierson, Stobart or Dowl ; it was with Tyne. Fleetingly, he remembered the Theory of Irresponsible Activity he had formulated ; he must have been light-headed at the time. Here he was faced with the weightiest problem of all time ; how was he to resolve it for what would ultimately prove the best ?

Turning towards the window, he gazed irritably out through the dusty panes, to hide his indecision from Murray and the girl. In the bright landscape outside, something moved. A man—or a Rosk—had dodged from one clump of bushes to another. Tyne's time was running low.

Abruptly, he turned back into the dull room. The RPF ought to have knowledge of the invasion plans, as Benda suggested ; the more dissention sown in Sumatran Base, the better. Equally, Earth must have the details ; then, they could be prepared for eventualities.

" A copy must be made of the microfilm, Miss Ittai," he said. " The U.N.C. will keep the copy to study. You will then be given safe conduct to slip back into your base with the original, to hand over to Tawdell Co Barr."

He turned to Murray, sitting now on the edge of the bed, stubbing out his mescahale.

" As you observed, time is short," he said. " Give me the microfilm quickly."

" You don't seem to take a point too well," Murray said. He rubbed his eyes, looking tired and irritable : it was as if he had suddenly realised that whether he personally triumphed now or not, life would ultimately triumph over him—impersonally, of course, but with as little remorse as if the issue were a personal one ! " Lord Almighty, Tyne, isn't it obvious to you what a fool you are being ? As I told you, I haven't got the microfilm."

The bent figures running behind bushes—they would be straightening up now, perhaps making a last dash for the temple. And there was Al Ian Cunliffe, permanently straightened up, stiff as a stick. The two images, spears of urgency and anger, struck at Tyne's mind. He flung himself at Murray.

Murray got half up, then fell back under the assault. They crashed together onto the bed. The middle of it fell through, pitching them onto the floor. Tyne rolled on top of Murray. Doubled up, Murray ground his knee into Tyne's solar plexus. Tyne brought his steel hand chopping down on the side of Murray's neck. Blue about the lips, Murray subsided.

" That'll settle . . . your . . ." Tyne gasped. He had been badly winded. Blobs of colour waved like flags before his eyes. He shook his head to get the knocking sound out of it, before realising that someone was actually hammering on the door.

Looking up amid the ruins of the big bed, he saw Benda Ittai —but through a haze—open the door ; one of the priests entered, speaking urgently to her. After a minute, she ran over to Tyne.

" The enemy are surrounding this building !" she said. " The priests have seen them. Quickly, we must get away ! I have a helicopter concealed outside. Come along !"

Seizing his good hand in her hot one, she pulled him to his feet. Murray groaned to himself as the weight shifted off him. Dazedly, Tyne allowed himself to be dragged from the room as the priest led them out. They trotted through the labyrinth of the building, Tyne gradually regaining his wits as they went. As they left the temple, he recalled that he had left his gun behind. It was too late to go back.

They emerged into a secluded courtyard surrounded by small cells once inhabited by novices. The whole place was slowly

crumbling ; it might have been built of old bread. Heat as choking as regret lay in the well of the mossy buildings. Under a stretched canopy of some camouflage material stood a small, trim helicopter. Benda ran across to it. She pressed one corner of the canopy and the whole thing collapsed, snapped up together like a blind. Picking it up, business-like, the girl stowed it into the helicopter and swung herself up.

She had an attractive pair of legs, Tyne thought. His powers of observation and deduction were returning. Even the sick feeling in his stomach was fading.

He pulled himself into the seat beside her as the priest backed bowing into the temple. At once, Benda started the rotors moving. They could see the disturbed heat move in whirlpools round them. Big green lizards scuttled for safety in the courtyard.

" Look !" Tyne shouted, pointing.

Over the top of a row of cells, a head appeared. Then shoulders. Then a rifle, swinging down to point into the helicopter. Rosk or man ? Did Benda know ? All she had said in the temple was ' The enemy are surrounding us.' By that, she might have meant Ap II Dowl's toughs, or Stobart's. Which indicated the ambiguity of the role she played.

Almost jabbing her elbow into Tyne's ribs, Benda thrust her hand down into a capacious pocket. She had one of those murderous .88's there. Whipping it round, leaning half out of the cabin, she took a pot-shot at the sniper on the roof.

She missed.

Tyne saw the ridge of the roof shatter, spraying bits of tile into the sniper's face. His rifle went off wildly as he flung his hands up to a bleeding mouth. Then the helicopter began to rise.

As they began to bucket upwards, a man ran from the temple into the bright sunlight. It was Stobart, his face blistered with sweat, his great body heaving with exertion. Although he clasped a gun in one hand, he made no attempt to shoot ; instead he was bellowing at Tyne, beckoning him savagely. Not a word came through the blanketing roar of the rotors above them.

" Just away in time !" Benda called.

Rising speedily about the ramshackle knot of temple buildings, they slanted eastwards and saw ant-sized men run into the open. Their shadow fled across the ants. The ants were firing upwards, fruitlessly.

VII

Mopping his face, Tyne thought hard. It was obvious enough that the charming Miss Ittai, far from having saved his life again, as he had at first believed to be the case, had tricked him into getting into the helicopter. She had wanted, for reasons of her own, to get him away from his own people. His brain was still muzzy from the effect of Murray's knee in his stomach ; savagely, he shook his head. Muzzy he might be, but on several points he was clear enough. And one of them was : this little beauty was heading in the direction of the Roskian Sumatra Base as fast as she could go.

A little, round cloud formed ahead of them. Another one grew out of nothing to port ahead, and another beyond that. They hit turbulence and lumped heavily up and down. Someone below had an anti-flight gun trained on them.

Tyne looked down, but could see only roads and plantations. All round the outskirts of Padang, the U.N.C. Force had pockets of fortification and defence. Stobart must have worked quickly in getting onto them. In a minute, Tyne thought, interceptors would be up after them. He did not relish the idea.

The same thought had occurred to the girl. Grimly, she was knocking every last spark of power out of the machine. Another crumpling explosion outside sent them rocking sideways. Locking the controls on a climbing course, she turned to Tyne. Suddenly, the gun was in her hand again.

" I hate to do this, but you must realise I will do anything to succeed, anything," she said. " This mission must be carried through at all costs. Beside it, none of us matter at all. If you so much as move suspiciously I will kill you. I will have to kill you."

" You know, you interest me, Benda," Tyne said. " Why couldn't you have fallen in with the scheme for duplicating the microfilm I suggested back in the temple ?"

She smiled dismissively. " Do you really think your people would let you, me or the film go, once they had us ? You are really an amateur, Tyne."

" I've heard that said before, thanks. What do you want me to do ?"

The craft bucked furiously as he asked. Hanging on, keeping the gun fixed on him, Benda said, " It is getting rough. We are probably being pursued so you must bail out. There

is one of our mini-rotor kits behind you, which is the equivalent of your parachutes. Put it on, jump ! That will be a distraction to the U.N.C. Forces. Possibly when they see you are going down, they will cease to chase me. Also, this little flier will travel faster without you."

" You have it all worked out," Tyne said admiringly. " And it can't be far to the Rosk base now. Anything else you want before I go ?"

Her gun waved a little.

" Yes," she said. " Unscrew your false hand and give it to me."

A wave of something like triumph ran over Tyne. So at last he had guessed, and guessed rightly. Benda had ' rescued ' him for the same reason that Murray had deliberately left him a trail to follow : because Tyne was absolutely essential to their plan. All the time he had seemed to be on the fringe of events, he had been at the centre.

Murray had wanted a safe hiding place for the microfilm, somewhere where his contact could still get them even if he were intercepted. So when Tyne was unconscious on the trip back from Luna Area 101, it had been an easy matter for him to slip the little spool inside the cavity of one of Tyne's steel fingers. Then he had played on Tyne's feelings harshly enough to ensure the latter followed him, made himself conveniently accessible ! All the time that Tyne had presumed himself to be acting under free will, to be daring all in the name of action, his moves had been calculated long in advance by someone else. The puppet had danced, unconscious of its strings.

Reading the anger and resentment on Tyne's face, Benda jerked the gun at him in warning.

" Fire !" he said. " For God's sake, fire, girl ! I'm less of an amateur than you think. When I thought about it, it was obvious why you left Murray behind at the temple instead of me ; before I broke in on the pair of you, he told you what he'd done about hiding the film, didn't he ?"

" I'm sorry," she said. " You were rather sweet." Shutting her eyes, she fired at point blank range. He watched her little fist contract as she squeezed the trigger.

Tyne opened his good hand, showing her a palm full of the semi-self-propelled bullets.

" I emptied your gun while you were playing with the controls. I thought you might be dangerous ; I was right, wasn't I ?"

Unexpectedly, she burst into tears ; they looked much like any girl's tears. Tyne did not realise at the time the relief those tears expressed ; relief both at having done her duty and at having been baulked of the necessity for taking life. Pulling the gun from her hand, Tyne reloaded and thrust it into his own pocket.

Now he turned his attention to the helicopter.

The anti-flight barrage had dropped behind. They were over jungle now, still gaining height. Screwing his eyes against the sun's glare, Tyne peered back into the blue sky. Scudding behind them, a V-shape moved low over the variegated cover, gaining, climbing. It was a manned interceptor, coming after them fast.

It seemed to be a case of get down or be shot down. Tyne grabbed the controls, angling the rotors, letting them slide down the sky. He felt only exhilaration at that moment.

Away ahead, blue, hazy, an egg stuck out of the broken wash of landscape. It was the grounded Alpha II ship. They were that near Rosk Base ! Tyne growled with a sort of pleasure. At least he had saved himself a visit there. Moreover, although at the eleventh hour, he had saved the situation ; Benda sat helpless beside him, suddenly drained of will. He was in control now.

He felt more than heard the interceptor come up. Tyne jogged the wheel, letting them sideslip—but not out of danger. An air-charge burst above the cabin. The controls went dead instantly, their vital elements fused.

Tyne cursed as the helicopter jerked over onto its back, clouting his head against a brace. For a moment he became detached from the scene, watching as from a long distance while the Rosk girl wrenched helplessly at the panel. Then the jungle spun up, and he snapped back into full possession of his senses. They were about to crash !

" Hang on !" he yelled.

So he was in control, was he ?—And this was what being in control consisted of : hanging on !

They struck !

In the terrifying concussion, shreds of pulpy green stuff flew everywhere. The helicopter split like matchwood. Yet they were lucky. They had crashed into a thicket of giant cactus, some pillars of which reared twenty-five feet high. The stuff acted like a great pulpy cushion, breaking their fall.

Groaning, Tyne rolled over. Benda sprawled on top of him. Dragging her with him, still groaning with mingled shock and relief, Tyne crawled out of the debris, pushed his way painfully through shattered cacti, and stood up. Groggily, he looked round him.

The helicopter had crashed on an old lava bed. Rutted and furrowed, it supported little in the way of vegetation except for the occasional thicket of cactus, which crept tenaciously along fault lines. It was as forbidding a landscape as could be imagined. A quarter of a mile away stood a low rampart : the fortified perimeter of Sumatra Base. Directly he saw it, Tyne dropped to his knees. It did not do to come within range of that place.

As he was trying to drag the unconscious girl behind a cactus cliff, a shadow swooped across him. The interceptor was coming in to land. It amazed him that there was still no activity from the Rosk base ; they had been known to fire on any Earth plane flying so near the perimeter. Settling Benda down as comfortably as he could, Tyne ran back to meet his pursuer.

The interceptor had landed tail first on its buffers. Already the pilot was picking his way over the uneven ground towards Tyne ; although his head was bent as he watched his footing over the lava, Tyne recognised him. Dodging behind some nearby columns of cactus, he drew Benda's gun and waited in ambush for him.

" Raise your hands !" he said, as the man appeared.

Startled, Allan Cunliffe did as he was told.

" You don't have to aim that thing at me, Tyne," he said quietly. He bit his lips and looked round anxiously.

" I think I do," Tyne replied. " Until about ten minutes ago, I thought you were dead ; now I want a few explanations from you."

" Didn't Murray tell you I was still alive ?"

" No, Murray didn't have time to tell me much. I worked this one out for myself, believe it or not. As soon as I knew Murray had tricked me into following him around, I guessed his tale about shooting you on Luna was a lie, the carrot that kept me going like a donkey ; I had thought it unlikely to begin with. Obviously that means you're as implicated as he. Take your belt off."

" My trousers will fall down."

" Keep clear of the cactus then !"

" You're not pleased to see me, Tyne, you're all mixed up."

" So mixed up I trust no-one. I regard you as an enemy, Allan."

Tyne took the belt and began to tie Allan's hands behind his back. As he worked, Allan talked, protesting.

" Listen, Tyne, you can trust me, just as you always could. Do you think I'd work for the Rosks in any way ? I'll tell you this : I was a U.N.C. agent before I ever met you—even before I joined the Space Service. And I can prove I'm an agent. Look, the two men who caught up with you at the plankton plant, and were in the car when the fly-spy appeared—"

" Dickens and the dumb fellow ?" Tyne asked. " What about them ?"

" *I* was the dumb one, Tyne ! I had to keep masked and silent or you'd have recognised me."

Allan stood there helpless now, his trousers sagging down to his knees. In sudden fury, Tyne pushed him over and knelt by him, grabbing his shirt in his fist.

" You bastard, Allan ! *Why* couldn't you have spoken ? Why've I had to go round in the dark all the time, nobody helping me ?"

Allan tried to roll away from him, his face black.

" You still had to think I was dead then, in case you gave up the hunt for Murray," he said. " Time was short ; we wanted you to keep driving ahead. Don't you see that when Dickens had given you a spot of necessary information, we were going to *let* you escape !"

" You could be lying now !"

" Why should I lie ? You must have that microfilm now—you reached Murray ; all that's needed is to get it to U.N.C. as quickly as possible. Hand it over to me and let's get back to safety."

Tyne's heart jumped. So Allan—once his friend, now (caught in the no-man's land of intrigue) his rival — did not know how Murray had concealed the invasion plans. Grabbing him by his jacket front, Tyne dragged him until they were behind a cactus clump, out of sight of the Rosk base, still surprisingly silent and menacing.

" Tell me what happened on Area 101 when I was laid low," he demanded. " When you were supposed to have been killed."

" It's no secret," Allan said. " You went out like a light when you were hit on the shoulder. Murray and I tried to carry you back to the ship and of course the Rosk caught us and disarmed us. There were only three of them—did you know that ?—but in their far more efficient suits, they made rings round us. They told us that they and the fellow manning the searchlight were the only members of the peace faction, the RPF, supporting Tawdell Co Barr on Luna. But they'd managed to filch these plans ; that was easy enough. The trouble was to get them to Earth—they were all three already under suspicion.

" When we heard the facts from them, Murray volunteered to take the spool to their Padang contact. To make sure he did so, they said they would hold me hostage. I watched Murray drag you back into the ship and leave."

" How did you get away from them ?" Tyne asked suspiciously.

" I didn't. They let me go of their own accord after a while. At first I thought it was for the reason they gave, that they could not keep me concealed anywhere from Ap Dowl's secret police ; but it wasn't. They wanted me loose so that I could set the World Government forces onto Murray. I made full pelt for U.N.C. HQ Luna in the stolen lunarider they gave me, and got through to Double K Four—the agent you know by the name of Stobart. By the time he picked you up in the bar of the Roxy, he had heard from me and knew roughly what was going on. Then I got back to Padang myself as quickly as possible, meeting up with Stobart and Dickens. By then—"

" Wait a minute," Tyne said.

He could hear a whine growing louder in the sky. He had been listening for it. Other interceptors were heading this way. Allan looked up with hope in his eyes. Tyne had less than five minutes left.

" I don't know what you're talking about," he said roughly to Allan. " You tell me these Roskian pacifists let you go so that you could set our people onto Murray, just when everything depended on his getting through ? How do you make sense of that ?"

" The whole business was staged to look as if everything depended on Murray's getting through. In fact, those RPF boys were clever ; they wanted Murray caught with the film on him. They never intended anything but that the plans should fall into Earth hands. If Murray had double-crossed them, so

much the better. Of course, Tawdell's agent here, the girl Ittai, didn't know that ; she went to meet Murray in all good faith."

" Why go such a long way round about it ? Why didn't they just post the film, once they had stolen it, direct to U.N.C.?"

Allan laughed briefly.

" And who'd have believed it ? You know how the political situation stands. If the film had been sent direct to us, it would probably have been dismissed as just another of Ap II Dowl's threats. The Area 101 RPF had even planted that strange object we had to investigate outside their dome as a bait ; we happened to be the mice who came and sniffed at the cheese."

Tyne stood up. He could see the interceptors now, three of them flying low. At any minute now, they would see the crashed helicopter and be coming down.

" You've made yourself clear," he said to Allan. " The whole episode has been a twist from start to finish, and I've had to take most of the twisting. Only one thing isn't clear to me."

Hopefully, Allan propped himself on one elbow and asked what that was.

" I don't know who I can trust but myself. Everyone else is playing a subtle double game."

" You can trust Stobart, even if you refuse to trust me. He should be in one of those three interceptors."

" I trust nobody, not even that fat slob Stobart !"

Stooping, he wrenched Allan's trousers off, tied them savagely round his ankles.

" Sweat it out, feller !" he advised. " Your pals will be down in a couple of minutes to put your pants on. And don't forget to look after Benda Ittai. She's over by the crash. Meanwhile, I'm borrowing your machine."

Ignoring Allan's shouts, he ran across the lava bed to the grounded interceptor. The other planes were wheeling overhead. As he pulled himself into the swing seat, the radio was calling.

" . . . Why don't you answer ? What's happening down there ?" It was Stobart's voice, harsh but recognisable.

Puffing, assuming Allan's voice as well as he could, Tyne flipped the speech switch and said, " Regret delay . . . fight with Leslie . . . I've got him tied up . . . Come on down."

" Have you got the microfilm ? Murray Mumford reports that it's in Tyne's false hand."

" I haven't got it. Come on down," Tyne said, cutting the voice off. Switching on the feed, he tensed himself and eased in the jets. Rocking skywards, the interceptor responded perfectly ; Tyne had flown these machines back in his training days.

With joy, he thought of the indecision that must be clouding Stobart's mind. Yes, Stobart would be suspicious. But Stobart would have to land to discover what was going on. Tyne found himself hoping that the guns of the Rosk base would open up. Just to give the agent a scare.

He checked the fuel, finding his tanks almost full. Excellent; he could get to Singapore, centre of World Government, in one hop. He was not going to unscrew his steel fist for anyone less than Governor-General Hjanderson of the U.N.C.

VIII

It was, and the most scrupulous person must agree, a beautiful cell ; commodious, with toilet and bathroom (complete with shower and massage unit) attached, it was furnished in impeccable if uninspired taste, and provided with books, visicube and pictures ; there was air-conditioning, there was concealed lighting ; but it was still a cell.

The food was excellent and Tyne had eaten well. The couch comfortable and Tyne had slept well. The carpet was deep, and Tyne now walked restlessly back and forth upon it.

His left hand was missing.

He had been confined here for twenty hours. Arriving in Singapore shortly after two o'clock on the previous afternoon, he had been arrested at once, interrogated at length and shut in here. His questioners had been civil, removing his steel hand sympathetically, even apologetically. Since then, all his wants had been ministered to, and his patience had been exhausted

A knock came at the door. They knocked ! It seemed the ultimate in irony. A slender man with a face the colour of an old pocket, dressed in a faultless suit, entered and attempted to smile at Tyne.

" Would you be so kind as to step this way to see Governor Purdoe ?" he asked.

Tyne saved his wrath, carrying it almost gleefully behind the minion until he was ushered into a large, bare room where a uniformed octogenarian rose from behind a desk. This was

Prison Governor Purdoe, a watchful man with a watchful smile arranged on his apple-clean face.

"How much longer am I going to be locked up here ?" Tyne demanded, marching up to his desk. " When am I going to see Hjanderson ? What the devil do you want to talk to me about ?"

" I am the governor of this institute," the old man said reprovingly, without removing his smile.

" Let's not bring class into this. All I want to know is am I or am I not a bloody hero, if I am, is this the sort of treatment you think I enjoy ?"

" You are indeed a hero, Mr. Leslie," the governor said placatingly, " Nobody denies it. Please sit down and smoke a mescahale and let some of the blood drain out of your head."

Governor Purdoe came round from behind the desk. He was small but impressive, aged perhaps, but not old. He stood in front of Tyne, looking at him until he seated himself ; then he said, " It may console you to know that your two associates in this affair, Murray Mumford and Allan Cunliffe, are also detained here. We are not sitting idly by. Your stories are being correlated."

" All I'm saying is that there was no need to place me under lock and key to start with. I came here voluntarily, didn't I ?"

The governor inclined his grey head.

" When you arrived, there was a general U.N.C. call out for you, dead or alive. You were fortunate, Mr. Leslie, that we managed to get you and keep you safely before less enlightened parties reached you. An agent whom I believe you know as Stobart had reason to fear, when you tricked him yesterday, that you might have turned traitor. He merely took the precautions expected of him."

" Don't mention Stobart to me, Governor ! It brings me out in a rash. Just tell me what you wanted me for. Can I have my fist back ?"

Governor Purdoe smiled a little bleakly. Seen close to, the smile was not attractive.

" Shortly," he said. " I summoned you here because I wanted in general to tell you that you are in the best place here —that far from being neglected, you are the prime mover in a lot of intense activity, most of which necessarily remains secret, even from you—and in particular to tell you that Governor-General Hjanderson will come to thank you personally as soon as possible. We believe you acted with excellent intentions, you see."

Snorting, Tyne stubbed out his mescahale on the shiny desk top and jumped up. He topped Purdoe by a head, but the latter never moved.

" Governments !" he snapped. " You people are all alike ! Diplomacy and suspicion—nothing but ! Nobody trusting anybody ! Don't you take anything that happens at its face value ?"

" You have run into a lot of trouble because you did just that," the governor said. He turned away, walked round behind his desk, sat down with a hint of tiredness. His manicured right hand performed a gesture of contempt. " There is no trust anywhere, Leslie. I regret it as much as you, but I face the fact. None of you young men are realists. These plans for the invasion from Alpha Centauri II—not a word about them must escape ; that is just one good reason for your continuing to stay with us. Try—please try to think less of yourself, and reflect instead on the grave issues looming behind these plans. Sithers, conduct our guest back to his—room."

The man with the dirty linen face came forward. Tyne shrugged his shoulders, making hopelessly towards the door ; he knew he would get nothing out of Purdoe even if he squeezed him like a sponge. He had met the institutional type before.

In the doorway he paused.

" Just tell me one tiny, weeny little state secret, governor," he begged. " All that tale Allan Cunliffe told me about the Rosks really manoeuvring to get the microfilm in our hands—was that true or false ?"

An odd expression—it might have been another smile—passed over the governor's face and vanished.

" Cunliffe has been an excellent agent for a number of years," he said, " and, though I grant you it does not necessarily follow, everything he told you was perfectly correct. The RPF wanted us to get the invasion plans. However, there was one minor point he missed, because he could not possibly have known it. The invasion plans themselves are probably false."

The rest of that day passed with intolerable slowness for Tyne.

He reflected, as the governor had urged him to do, on the grave issues behind the Rosk invasion plans. One issue at least stuck out a mile. There had been no proof as yet that Alpha II's technology was far in advance of Earth's in this last decade

of the twenty-second century : even the construction of a gigantic interstellar ship was, in theory at least, not beyond Earth's resources. But an interstellar invasion implied many things. It implied, surely, some form of faster-than-light communication between Ap II Dowl's force and Alpha II. It implied, too, a drive a good deal faster than the one professedly used to get the first ship here, for no invasion would be feasible between planets a two-generations ' journey apart. It implied, undoubtedly, an integration of planetary resources vastly superior to anything Earth dreamed of, split as it was into numerous fractious nations. It implied, above all, an overweening confidence in success ; as vast an undertaking as an interstellar invasion would never get under way unless the powers behind it considered it a fool-proof scheme.

The picture was not, Tyne admitted to himself, anything but gloomy. The role he had played in it shrank into the mere prologue to a whole volume of catastrophe.

But if the plans were false ?

What did that mean ? Had the RPF been tricked, perhaps, into believing that the belligerent forces would do one thing, whereas actually they intended to do another ? Tyne sitting hour after hour in his so comfortable, so commodious cell, could invent many such unhelpful questions to ask himself. Only the answers were beyond him.

If he disliked not knowing the answers, he disliked knowing the questions even more.

On the third day of Tyne's imprisonment, he was summoned again to the governor's presence. He appeared in chastened mood before the old man.

" I've had no news," he said. " What's the general situation ? Are the Rosks making a move ?"

" The situation has changed very radically since we last met," Purdoe said, his face crumpling into innumerable pleats as he smiled. " And may I say, Mr. Leslie, how glad I am that you no longer come into here clamouring for release. You have been thinking, I take it ?"

Tyne sighed.

" I'm not really a man of action, governor, but that doesn't mean you have to be avuncular with me. What have you brought me here for this time ?"

" Take a mescahale, young man. The Governor-General of the U.N.C., Mr. Hjanderson, is here to see you ; and I should

advise you to watch your tongue for the occasion. Now please excuse me for a minute."

He disappeared through a rear door with his sprightly old man's gait. To kill time, Tyne stared at the linen-faced attendant who had brought him here ; the attendant fingered his tie and coughed.

Hjanderson, when he appeared, was instantly recognisable : dapper, fifty-ish, a little like a wolf with an expense account, smelling agreeably of the most fashionable shaving soap. He shook hands briskly with Tyne and sat down facing him, palms pressed on knees.

" I promised to come and see you," he said, " and I have kept that promise. I regret it has taken me so long to do so. These have been days of crisis. Very grave crisis."

" I'm pleased if I have been of any service. Perhaps I can have my hand back now, sir."

Hjanderson brushed most of this aside.

" Service ? Yes, Leslie, I think you played your part as you saw it. You were never more than partially in the picture, you know. We have received a great deal of help from the Roskian girl, Benda Ittai, whom you left for dead beside her crashed helicopter."

With an effort, Tyne swallowed this blatant misrepresentation; his term with the U.N.C. had accustomed him to such gambits.

" Apart from the fact that I did not leave her for dead, how is she ? Where is she ?" he asked.

" She is radiant ; she is here," Purdoe said, interrupting, coming up from behind his desk. With his thin, veined hand he touched—for whatever privately submerged reason of his own—the arm of the fur coat Benda wore, as he ushered her through the rear doorway and into the office.

" Benda !" Tyne exclaimed. Forgetting the Governor-General of the U.N.C., he went over to her and took her hands Hot ; 105.1 ; alien ; but beautiful ; and smiling in most tender fashion. He couldn't let her get away with it so easily.

" Haven't seen you since you tried to shoot me," he said affably.

" The situation has changed," she said, still smiling. The tormented look she had worn when putting him ashore on the island had entirely gone now.

" Since you appear to have lost interest in the political situation," Hjanderson said dryly, rising to his feet, " it

remains for me only to tell you that you are now a free man, Mr. Leslie. Moreover, I think I can mention that it is possible you may eventually get some sort of decoration ; the E.D.C.E., probably."

" I'll wear it all the time," Tyne promised, " but before you go, please tell me about the invasion—what's happening, what's been done about it ?"

" Miss Ittai can tell you the details," Hjanderson said, smiling and extending a sharp hand. " Now you must excuse me ; I have a news conference to attend. I am, of course, delighted to have been able to see you. I wish you good luck for the future."

" Of course," Tyne murmured vaguely. He turned to Benda before Purdoe had shown the Governor-General out. " I'd prefer to ask you this over a restaurant table, but what's been happening that I don't know about ?"

" Perhaps the table can be arranged later," she said. " From now on—whether that is what I want or not—I am on your side of the fence. I cannot go back to my people. That is why I have told the Governor-General the truth as I have found it to be.

" The invasion plans, as I think you have heard, are false. And not they only. The RPF also was a spurious organisation! Don't mistake me—a lot of its members genuinely wished for peace between Rosk and Man, as I did and still do myself. But Tawdell Co Barr is, and must always have been, a puppet of Ap II Dowl's. No doubt we should all have been wiped out when we had served our purpose."

" Budo Budda was out to kill you as it was," Tyne said.

" Oh quite ; I was merely expendable, I fear. Even Budda would not have known the RPF was a dummy front—otherwise he would not have been after Murray. Only Ap II and Tawdell Co Barr are supposed to know."

" And how did you find out ?"

She shrugged her shoulders, her face puckered as she recalled that horrible moment of revelation.

" For some time, small events in the Base had made me suspicious, but I really knew what was happening when we crashed near Sumatra Base and they neither opened fire on us nor sent a party out to pick us up. Their silence could mean only one thing : the plans were never meant to get to them ; they did not want them. The plans were intended only for U.N.C. eyes. They were false, designed only to scare Earth."

" They certainly did that," Tyne agreed. " This clears up one point that has been bothering me. I'd been wondering what this spool of microfilm was doing on Luna in the first place. Obviously it was planted there where its journey to your base would attract maximum attention."

Benda Ittai began to look moist about the eyes, as the treachery of her fellow beings struck her afresh. Turning to Purdoe, who stood sympathetically by, Tyne asked, " What was Ap II Dowl's idea in all this ?"

With a barely perceptible gesture, Purdoe led Tyne to the other side of the room.

" This is all very sad for the young woman," he said in an official voice. " You see the invasion scare was Dowl's last bluff. When confronted in the Council with our knowledge of the plans, he would probably have said that he would call the attacking fleet off if we'd give him all Sumatra, or perhaps Africa as well, or half the globe, or whatever his megalomaniac mind conceived. He's got nothing to back a real threat, Leslie. This was pure bluff from start to finish. You were really ill-advised, if I may say so, to get mixed up in it."

" We've all been chasing around risking our necks," Tyne said testily, " just to serve Dowl's purpose. But how are you so *sure* it's all bluff ?"

For answer, the governor pulled a message form from his pocket and unfolded it daintily. Tyne recognised the flimsy as a signal which had come through secret governmental channels.

" This arrived just before I summoned you," Purdoe said. " Please read it. You will find it enlightening."

The message read : ' Circulation : Govt Levels A-C only and List 566 as specified. Text begins : Hoyle Observatory, Luna, confirms Alpha Centauri about to go nova. Increase to apparent magnitude Minus One expected by end of year. This temperature rise will be sufficient to render life on its planets untenable. Authoritative circles confirm that first signs of nova effect would have been observable locally three generations ago in sunspot and radio phenomena. Rosk ship may therefore be regarded as lifeboat; no doubt other lifeboats despatched to other nearby systems. Therefore chances of invasion now highly improbable, repeat highly improbable. Suggested course of action : summit announcement of text of this action, with warning to Ap II Dowl to settle down or move on. Text ends. 10/10/2193 Luna-Singa-Beam Y.'

Tyne put the flimsy down, slowly, blankly. Round his head ran some lines from an historical solid, the name of which eluded him : ' Thus enterprises of great pith and moment, With this regard their currents turn awry, And lose the name of action.' Was it Shakespeare ? He was confused ; from the diplomatic point of view, this, of course, was a triumph. The Rosks stood revealed in all their weakness. and could now be squashed as Earth saw fit. Yet in Tyne's head, the picture of oceans steaming, babies cooking slowly in cellars, planets gradually turning to ashes, seemed to him something less than a happy ending.

" I must say I have marked you down," Governor Purdoe said, regarding Tyne coldly, " as rather a hard and impertinent young man. How typical of your generation that you should have no reaction to this great news !"

" Good heavens !" Tyne exclaimed. " I was just thinking—"

" Forgive me if I interrupt ; no doubt you were thinking of your own personal glory ; I can read you like a book. When Governor-General Hjanderson gave you your freedom, I hoped it meant you would leave here at once. Will you please do so now ? And one thing—please take Miss Ittai with you. I understand she has formed an attachment for you ; for me, that will always remain the ultimate proof of Roskian misguidedness."

Tyne looked hard at the old man, so neat, so smiling. With unexpected self-control, he swallowed his anger. He wanted to say that it would be impossible to understand a Rosk as long as it was impossible to understand a man, but the words did not come. There were no words ; he realised he could comprehend Purdoe no more than Purdoe comprehended him.

Frustratedly, he turned to Benda Ittai. Here at least was someone worth trying to comprehend.

He felt like spending a life at it.

" Let's go and find that restraurant table I was telling you about," he said, taking her arm.

She smiled at him. It was a very comprehensible smile.

Brian W. Aldiss

The accumulation of titles for review appears rather overwhelming after the dearth earlier in the year, but an analysis of the pile shows only one original novel by an English writer, one new semi-juvenile, an import from America, an English anthology compiled from American sources, and no less than three Jules Verne reprints. Basically, then, my comments in the July issue still apply, although the obvious interest maintained by our publishers during the summer months is very encouraging. Moreover a small but steady flow of science-fictional paper-backs, mentioned later, continues to represent the genre in this increasingly important book field.

In Edmund Crispin's latest anthology **Best SF: Three** (Faber and Faber, 15/-) I found—as usual—his introduction to be an integral part of the collection. Mr. Crispin is the English counterpart of August Derleth, whose American anthologies were for many years the most carefully selected and ably presented collections extant. And like Derleth he enhances his prefaces with an erudition and careful analysis of a subject on which he is now no small authority. (See John Carnell's Editorial in *New Worlds* No. 75). In support of his theory that science-fiction performs a sterling service in pointing Man's insecurity in the larger scheme of things—beyond the narrow confines of mainstream literature, with its " monotonously humanist bias . . . almost uniformly catatonic in its withdrawal from environment "—Mr. Crispin selects eleven stories mostly taken from the pages of the three major American s-f magazines. The general theme is that of homo sapiens losing a little of its congenital complacency in the face of some rather alarming adversaries or conditions. Here man is confounded by alien planetary cultures, spies in atomic piles, ominous appetites of extraterrestrial visitors, and whimsicalities of time, human artifacts and even shattering inventions by lunatic youths. But—and there must be a moral here—the three stories, " The Gift of Gab," " Four in One," and " The Game of Rat and Dragon," which retain

vestiges of Man's nobility and adaptability for survival, are outstandingly impressive. Always excepting, of course, the iconoclastic Fredric Brown's short-short which has the supremely ironic last word.

By contrast, Brian Aldiss' **Non-Stop** (Faber and Faber, 15/-) is a science-fiction adventure in the grand manner. Having nothing in common with the Aldiss of *Space, Time and Nathaniel*, except satisfying story-telling, his first novel is a neat variation of a starship's closed environment going awry, with the later generations of its crew, purpose lost in dim legend, struggling towards awareness of their situation. The plot twists are ingeniously contrived, but not unexpected. Where Aldiss scores is in his uncomplicated action-filled development of the story which guarantees interest to the end.

David Duncan's **Occam's Razor** (Gollancz, 12/6d) is a great improvement on his two previous s-f novels (*Dark Dominion* and *Beyond Eden*). A deceptively simple, action-paced story of the effects of an experiment, ingeniously detailed and explained concerning the minimal paths to other space-time continuums, it re-created for me that sense of wonder not often encountered since the early days of the pulp magazine.

Ostensibly for the younger reader, Hugh Walters' **The Domes Of Pico** (Faber and Faber, 13/6d) is a sequel to, and as equally a successful salubrious adventure yarn for the tolerant adult as *Blast-Off at Woomera*. At the end of that, you will remember, young Chris Godfrey, the world's first rocket pilot, had discovered some strange dome structures on the far side of the Moon. These domes now spell menace to the Earth and once again the youth risks his life to end the book happily. Until the next time?

We are indebted to the veteran Vernophile, Mr. I. O. Evans, for the new Fitzroy Edition of Jules Verne's famous romances. Of the first three to be issued—**Five Weeks in a Balloon—A Floating City—The Begum's Fortune** (Bernard Hanison Ltd., Arco Publishers, 12/6d each) the latter is most worthwhile as perhaps Verne's most interesting, yet comparitively unknown, fantasy, dealing with the conflict between two opposed scientific city-states established in North America. This new edition has a handsome uniform format, with attractive dust-wrappers, and I understand that 49 titles in all are planned at the rate of six per year. Each book enjoys

a brief but informative introduction by Mr. Evans, and altogether this impressive project is worthy of full support.

Before leaving the hard-cover section, a recommendation is in order, I think, for John Christopher's new novel **The Caves Of Night** (Eyre and Spottiswoode, 13/6d), which, although not fantasy, is strictly science-fiction in that it is an adventure in speleology. Lacking the emotional impact of *Death of Grass* it is nevertheless a starkly realistic drama of a group of cave explorers trapped under the Austrian Alps. Recommended as a crackingly good suspense yarn.

Among the paper-backs, it is good to see Isaac Asimov well represented with three of his superb novels available in cheap form—**I, Robot** (Digit, 2/-), **The Currents Of Space** (Panther, 2/6d) and **Pebble In The Sky** (Corgi, 2/6d). Rex Gordon's story of a castaway on Mars, **No Man Friday** (Corgi, 2/6d) is also a good buy, together with Fredric Brown's **Project Jupiter** (Digit, 2/-). Of two "books of the film"—**The Revenge Of Frankenstein** (Panther, 2/6d) and Richard Matheson's **The Shrinking Man** (Gold Medal, 2/-)—the latter is thoroughly recommended, even if you have seen the film, as this expanded scenario is superbly written. Incidentally, the original and much maligned classic of the Gothic style, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's **Frankenstein,** can now be had in pocket book format, complete and unabridged (WDL Books, 2/6d).

Finally, if you missed it in its original hardcover format, an outstanding buy is Edmund Crispin's **Best S-F : One,** just issued in an attractive limp-cover format at 6/- (Faber and Faber). To date it is still the best of the three he has edited.

Leslie Flood

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Dear John,

The effect of the cover of *New Worlds* No. 72 is quite startling. It was this simplicity and difference that I had in mind some eighteen months or so ago. In your January editorial, *New Worlds* 67, page 3, you said you were gradually " working up to the idea that abstract art is an expressionistic medium readily adaptable to stories of the future." In the " Profile " in No. 72 Brian Lewis refers to " abstract symbolisms." Yet, since *Science Fantasy* No. 26, your first experimental, and incidentally your worst cover, you have not produced a truly abstract one !

No. 69 was the first of such covers to appear on *New Worlds*; I was disappointed and almost wrote a scorching letter, but decided to give you a trial. Unfortunately you have failed ! I was hoping to see something like the covers Penguin Books are producing on some of their novels. These are good and abstract.

Maybe there is some semantic difficulty here. Maybe the covers you have produced are what *you* call abstract. They are in fact surrealistic, and if this is your idea, then I personally would prefer a return to the old-style covers. (You no doubt realise that I am one of the silent objectors to your dropping interior artwork—I didn't write, knowing the futility of it).

Abstract is the opposite of concrete, and abstract art depends for its effect upon the treatments used, particularly its lack of realism. It is debatable whether or not *pure* abstraction can be achieved as most shapes used in any painting have some basis in reality.

It is important that the relationship between the shapes and colours used should be Formal i.e. there should be nothing ' accidental ' in the placing or form of any part of the painting. (Cast shadows and natural treatments come under this apparently sweeping statement for they depend upon the ' accidental ' source of light). I hope you follow me ?

Strange though it may seem, Ashman, Dillon, and Gaughan from *Galaxy* are nearer to Abstraction than is Lewis. Even when using humans they avoid naturalism and use their lines and masses to produce a more decorative and interesting result.

Surrealism depends upon the incongruous for its effect, which may be of three main groups :—

(a) the familiar in unusual juxtaposition.
(b) the familiar in unfamiliar surroundings
or (c) the unfamiliar in familiar surroundings.

In the first case, assume we have a photo of a wristwatch, and one of a man. The two superimposed against a common background and are approximately the same size on the third print. Now we have Surrealism, for our sense of Design scale is totally disrupted. We have a real watch and a real man of the same size. Either we have an inconvievable large watch or one of Ray Cummings' " Incredible Shrinking Men !" thence the incongruity.

In (b) and (c) the degree of familiarity will vary depending upon the viewer. In our case I think we can take it that space-ships, space-suits, satellites, Geiger counters etc. are familiar to the science fiction fan. Even alien landscapes become ' familiar ' when treated realistically.

Now I would submit *this is exactly what Lewis has produced so far* !

Science Fantasy	No. 26—' Bob-sleigh in Hades '
	No. 27—' Take-off from Skittle Alley '
	No. 28—' Barbecue '
New Worlds	No. 69—' Spaceship refuelling off Zngpfit '
	No. 70—' Space Mech. Rosy takes a rest '
	No. 71—' Which Round-footed horror biffed Spaceman Jones ?'
	No. 72—" Who left that Giant-sized Spaghetti Machine there ?"

The reason for this, and the reason I could ' invent ' possible (?) titles is because Lewis has treated his subjects *realistically*. In every case these objects depicted *could* exist. Their value as pure Abstract shapes has been lost because they have been painted in a concrete technique. They have a *real* solidity. They have *real* depth as recognised by our well-developed sense of perspective. The placing of various objects is ' accidental,' not formal and randomness is a characteristic of reality.

In Nos. 69 and 71, the surroundings are generally familiar as landscapes. In the latter one could almost walk in those circular footprints and find out what happened to the late occupant of the red helmet. Apart from the high-triangle-piercing-towers (appearing in three out of four *New Worlds* covers) it could be a desert on Earth.

I could never understand why you printed No. 70 and but for the plain background it would be a quite ordinary old-type cover. No. 72 is quite ' familiar.' The spaceman and the crater wall are credible and fairly real. Only the two gizmos which could be living quarters seem strange. (I haven't read ' Idiots Delight ' yet but that should not effect its standing as a cover).

I realise of course that I am probably splitting hairs, that I am no doubt in a minority ; that you probably didn't mean ' abstract ' anyway, and that this lengthy missile will not affect your future policy materially, but at least I feel better now that I have written.

A. Taylor.
Todmorden, Surrey.

Dear Mr. Carnell,

Surely Mr. Francis is mistaken in his article " Low Gravity " (*New Worlds* 70) when he finds the mass lifted by his lunar weight-lifter will rise *slowly*, yet attain enough velocity to lift him off the ground.

If he chins the weight and hangs on— to be carried to, say, a total of eight feet from the ground (Mr. Francis said " a few feet up "), then, as he stopped pulling at shoulder level (five feet) he would have needed to give the three hundred pound mass a velocity of $\sqrt{30}$ ft./sec. (if moon gravity is 5ft./sec/sec.) before ceasing to pull. Assuming he pulls with the same force the whole time, he lugged this fifty pound earth equivalent up to shoulder-level in about one and a half seconds. This ignores the fact that the Law of Conservation of Linear Momentum would even further decrease his $\sqrt{30}$ velocity immediately upon " take-off " so that he would need a yet higher velocity (and consequently less time to lift the weight) by shoulder-level.

R. S. Cook
Ryde, Australia.

(Mr. Francis replies : " I must plead not guilty. To quote the relevant passage : ' Then he finds it rising slowly, and, encouraged, continues to pull as hard as he can, naturally reacting as if

it were only weight that was opposing him. By the time it reaches the level of his shoulder he will have given it quite a reasonable speed.' The word " slowly " applies only to the first stages of motion. Regarding figures, I calculate that an average force of 80lb over the five feet would create sufficient speed to take both man and load two feet from the ground, high enough to make it a memorable experience !")

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